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The Flight of (the) Concord: Joan Copjec and Slavoj Žižek read 'Irma's Injection'

Neil Cocks, University of Reading, UK

Abstract: In this article, I return to the 'over-interpreted anxiety dream' (Copjec, 2015) of 'Irma's Injection' to make a wider claim concerning an unacknowledged investment in structure that I understand to return to Žižekian appeals to the disruptive structure of the Real. I begin with the analysis of Freud's first specimen dream, and Lacan's response to this, offered by Joan Copjec, Žižek's fellow traveller in theory. My concern is with Copjec's staging of the encounter with the Real, both in its imaginary and symbolic modes, and the extent to which a renewed focus on the narrational frames of psychoanalytic accounts of 'Irma's Injection' can help bring to light their otherwise neglected appeals to structure.. Rather than a simple deconstructive evasion of the Real, I argue that such a move enables a questioning the location of the limit within Copjec's account of 'Irma's Injection': a return of the Real to the Real. This discussion results also in a more straightforward reassessment of the understanding of structure in 'Irma's Injection' as read by both Copjec and Žižek. I focus on one particular aspect, 'flight', understood to be: central to the structure of the dream; disruptive to this structure; a remaining and an escape; evasion and fidelity. Through the frame of 'flight', I re-evaluate the dream within/ across the work of Žižek and Copjec before, finally, contemplating how 'flight' might help to refigure the relationship between the two theorists, and the deconstructive practice that both question within their various responses to 'Irma's Injection'.

Keywords: Irma, Copjec, Žižek, death drive, Lacan, deconstruction, flight

i) Introduction: Irma again.

Irma again. But will this be a repetition held within a structure of fantasy, a deferral foolishly holding out for an end? Or is it instead to be an insistence, a carving out of an abyss, one that cares nothing for an answering voice? And what structures must be called upon, and what left unengaged, if we are to go one way or another?

ii) an 'over-interpreted anxiety dream'

Let us begin by returning to the familiar ground of the dream of 'Irma's Injection'. Freud opens the first extended self-analysis within *The Interpretation of Dreams* with a description a large hall, where he is receiving guests, and talking to a patient, Irma. Irma is unconvinced by the psychoanalytic solution to her health problems suggested by Freud, and he is concerned he might have overlooked an organic cause to her condition. Looking down her throat, he sees: 'a large white spot to the right, and [...] extended grayish-white scabs attached to curious curling formations, which have obviously been formed like the turbinated bone' (Freud 2001: 107). Three medical friends join him, and offer their diagnosis, with Freud concluding:

I quickly call Dr. M, who repeats the examination and confirms it.... Dr. M looks quite unlike his usual self; he is very pale, he limps, and his chin is clean-shaven.... Now my friend Otto, too, is standing beside her, and my friend Leopold percusses her covered chest, and says 'She has a dullness below, on the left,' and also calls attention to an infiltrated portion of skin on the left shoulder (which I can feel, in spite of the dress).... M says: 'There's no doubt that it's an infection [...] My friend Otto, not long ago, gave her, when she was feeling unwell, an injection of a preparation of propyl... propyls... propionic acid... trimethylamin (the formula of which I see before me, printed in heavy type).... One doesn't give such injections so rashly.... Probably, too, the syringe was not clean. (Ibid.)

Why return? Freud's specimen dream is so well-worn in psychoanalytic criticism that Joan Copjec's twenty seven year old assessment of an 'over-interpreted anxiety dream' has itself become familiar (Copjec 2015: 119; Sigler 2010). As my intention here is finally to engage Žižekian readings of 'Irma's Injection', as well as wider questions of Žižekian analysis, one place to start, I would contend, is precisely with this idea of over-interpretation. For Copjec, in a reading whose relation to Žižekian thought is to be the focus of my thinking, this is not a matter of simple exhaustion: it would be wrong, for example, to think that, through being

over-interpreted, there is a degree of interpretation that would have sufficed. The dream is understood by Copjec to begin with an anxiety producing encounter, the view down the throat. This is a meeting with the real that produces an 'affect' that 'cannot be doubted', and 'which nothing proceeds', it having 'neither an essence nor a signification, a signal [that] works without the use of any signifiers' (118-19).¹ From such claims, it follows that 'any *interpretation* of anxiety is superfluous and inappropriate' (119), and any engagement with 'Irma's Injection' that does not recognise this fails as a psychoanalytic response.

For Copjec, 'Irma's Injection' offers a lesson in the 'proper response' involves 'flee[ing]' or 'flight', from the traumatic scene (123; 120). Later in this article, I will be interested in thinking through how the question of 'flight' might impact on a comparative reading of appeals to structure in the work of Copjec, Žižek, and certain theorists that they set themselves against. For now, I will limit myself to a more straightforward introduction to Copjec's account of '*turning away*' in a dream that she takes to be split between the horrific encounter with Irma's throat and the comic medical interpretations that follow (120). In this understanding, in the second part of the dream, the real of anxiety is registered only in the 'failure of the symbolic reality', and thus no interpretation is offered (119). That is the explanation for the ironic notion that fleeing the real is essential to psychoanalytic practice: unlike conventional '*interpretation*', which seeks symbolic supplementation when confronted by the real (explanations drawn from other fields that seek to domesticate the disturbing threat of anxiety), the flight into the absurdity of the symbolic cannot help but keep hold of the real that has no secure place within its exchanges. What is proposed is not a repudiation of the real, not an embrace of the symbolic's endless chain of signification, but a recognition of the gap or limit necessary to that process: one should neither respond to an other with historicist contextualisation (working with the fundamental fantasy that a given supplement will complete the other, making it explicable), nor a deconstructive reading of their words (the hope that constitutive tensions can be tracked in the open-ended play of meaning, with no regard to the limit that language carves out and requires). It is claimed that such options involve fleeing the anxiety inducing encounter with the real in the wrong way, a foreclosing of the real, rather than its registration through negation. The theoretical approach favoured within 'Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety', the chapter within Copjec's *Read my Desire* that I am concerned with in this article, rather 'urge[s] analysts of culture to become literate in desire, to learn how to read what is inarticulable in cultural statements', not to limit themselves to a reading of the 'literal' text, but to take into account the 'real structure' and the gaps of desire that this text registers. (12) My contention is that, despite the commitment to reading, and the acknowledgement of the importance of symbolic frames, Copjec's seemingly non-interpretive theoretical response results in a generalised approach to 'Irma's

Injection' and the various other texts (from vampire fiction to Kantian aesthetics) that are understood to be its equivalent: genres are introduced through single texts, quotation is rare, textual engagement is predominantly at the level of plot, and structure is variously: overlooked; an aspect of the symbolic that is unquestionable ('there seems to be only one reading of this narrative pacing' [125]); unquestionable also as an aspect of the real that can nonetheless be read.

iii) **'...the real – Irma, her white scabs, the unconscious –'**

To initiate this questioning reading of 'Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety', I turn to Copjec's account of Jacques Lacan's celebrated framing of the dream:

The dream is divided by Lacan into two parts, each of which is marked by its own climax. In the first part, Freud appears as a man free of any 'Oedipus complex'; his research is driven entirely by his desire to know, whatever the cost. Propelled by this desire, he stalks his party guest, Irma, and, struggling against her resistances, peers curiously down her throat, only to make his truly horrible discovery. What he witnesses is the very 'origin of the world,' the equivalent of the female genitals. It is clear that the uncanny appearance of what ought to have remained hidden is a sickening, noxious sight. But what is it, really? 'A large white spot....curled structures....white-grey scabs.' Almost nothing. This is the climax of the first part of the dream, the anxiety-filled encounter with the object *a*.

After this encounter the dream switches to another mode [...] the second part of the dream is defined by a *turning away from* the object *a* that erupted in the first part [...] The abruptness of the transition indicates that Freud *flees* from the real – Irma, her white scabs, the unconscious – into the symbolic community of his fellow doctors. (Copjec 2025: 120)

Expanding upon this description of the 'anxiety filled encounter', Copjec claims that to look down the throat is to witness 'a point that interpretation, the logic of cause and effect, cannot bridge' (126). Again, it is to meet the real, experienced as an anxiety 'affect' that cannot be doubted. This real is the 'very origin of the world' because it is 'prior' to pathology and sentiment; a failure of the 'symbolic reality wherein all alienable objects, objects that can be given or taken away, lost and refound, are constituted and circulate' (119; 126). Copjec acknowledges that it is:

somewhat perverse[...] that Lacan should refer to this 'lack of a lack' as an encounter with an *object*: object *a*. But this object is unique. It has neither essence nor a signification. It cannot be communicated or exchanged. It has, in short, no *objectivity*. (119)

I will begin with what I take to be a problematic appeal to origins: the claim that Freud, on looking down Irma's throat, 'witnesses [...] the very "origin of the world"'. This is an origin that can be seen for what it is from a point of view other than its own, a witnessed origin, and I read in this the difficulty of conceiving of a narrational perspective that can access a state that is free from supplement.

There is a further issue with the supplement at this stage, in so far as the very "origin of the world" that is witnessed is 'the equivalent of female genitals'. The origin, as witnessed, has 'equivalence', it is divided, substitutive, 'alienable', and thus, in one sense, something other than real as understood by Copjec above. An additional and comparable difficulty can be introduced here, as what is witnessed is not 'really' the "origin of the world", but *something else*, and that is, finally, 'almost nothing'. 'Almost', because of its status as object *a*, yet the irony of the object, I would suggest, cannot be corralled within its lack of essence, that is, in the specific sense in which it is 'not an object' (119). Although in the first part of the dream Copjec's claim is that we are dealing only with the object *a* and its eruption, there the a-symbolic real is encountered in an object that can be separated into parts, a 'large white spot....curled structures....white-grey scabs'. Even for Copjec, the 'almost nothing' is thus divided from within. As some of these parts have 'structures', a notion of form is introduced. What, we might ask, determines 'structure', at this stage? What is the law of structure at this point in the analysis? And, going forward: how is this structure related to the further structures upon which Copjec calls?

The interest in the object *a*, for Copjec, might suggest an alternative reading, as it is her contention, as we know, that the symbolic registers the real. The claim is that although the Lacanian real cannot be included in the symbolic, it is signified in so far as it is what symbolic repetitions miss. The dream is thus not simply a movement from the real to the symbolic, but from the real to the symbolic that registers the inaccessible real (121 – 122). It is important to stress here, therefore, that Copjec's argument is that Freud has not entered the 'space' of the symbolic during its initial moments. The real as it is encountered through the symbolic's failure to meet it is, therefore, located strictly in the second part of the dream.

To begin to challenge these constructions of the real and the structural in Copjec's analysis, I am interested in following Lacan's own instruction when reading Freud's account of the injection dream: 'You must start from the text, start by treating it as Holy Writ' (Lacan 1988: 153). If we return to Lacan's text, and turn to the description of the anxious encounter in his second lecture on the dream that is glossed within Copjec's account, we read what he – but never Freud – figures as 'the horrendous sight' of the throat, set out in the following terms:

The mouth has all the equivalences in terms of significations that you want. Everything blends in and becomes associated in this image [...] There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands *par excellence*, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which promotes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final revelation of *you are this* – *You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness* (154)

I can certainly see why the appeal here might be to an anxiety inducing encounter with the real, with an unfathomable, formless or shapeless origin. As I read it, however, this real is not resistant to analysis simply because it has never had a place in the symbolic organisation. Within the specific formulation Lacan offers, what one sees, the horrendous sight, is of 'the flesh one *never* sees' (my italics. 'Celle de la chair qu'on ne voit jamais') (Lacan 1978, 186). Impossible seeing. More impossible still: from this flesh, 'everything exudes' ('la chair dont tout sort'), yet how, if the flesh must of necessity fall within the category of everything? The flesh is formless, yet this state is dependent on 'its form in itself' and all that this provokes, that is, a ghostly anxiety. This is a final revelation, one that splits the 'you', requiring, in its formlessness – that is, in its radical upsetting of the 'you' – a division. 'You' are positioned, in so far as the 'this' that is your other 'is so far away from you', yet the 'this' is also the 'you' that is positioned against it ('*tu es ceci, qui est le plus loin de toi, ceci qui est le plus informe*'). 'Ultimate formlessness', it would seem, does indeed require form. 'You' are not in your right place. 'You' are in the very place of the other that is necessary for the independent position of 'you'. I read in this not simply the real as void, the lack of a lack in the symbolic that can be secured, somehow, without reference to the specificity of text, but instead a constitutive impossibility to be read *in Lacan's narration*. The condition of not having a determinate place within the symbolic is not enjoyed only by the 'element' that has nothing to do with it. Instead, I read textuality turned against itself; a senselessness necessary to sense.

It might be suggested that the reading I offer here only confirms the Žižekian Real Real: ‘At its most elementary, the Real is non-identity itself, the impossibility for X to be (come) fully itself’: the flesh turned against itself; the origin of the world, with its divisions that cannot lodge within the give and take of the symbolic (Žižek 2013: 380); the real precisely as excess, but also as impossible, divided origin (473–74). I am, however, interested in the difficulty of keeping this real from deferral, of assuring the purity of its impossibility within a *reading* of the Lacanian and Freudian texts. ⁱⁱ

With this in mind, let us return, for a moment, to the questions of origins. In my understanding of Lacan’s formulation, ‘the foundation of things’ is haunted by the things it supports. The first moment is necessarily retrospective. Just like ‘the *other* side of the head’ (my italics), it cannot be taken on its own terms. This is one reason why the encounter will always be with ‘almost nothing’, and why this should not be understood as an absence, or an absence of absence, but, instead, a point of supreme density: ‘the mouth has all the equivalences in terms of significations, all the condensations you could want’. The mouth is not the pure site of affect, with ‘the real [as] Irma, her white scabs’, but something over-determined, having an abundance of signification that, even as it is held out of reach of one’s wanting through the modal ‘could’, threatens the lack that constitutes desire. Caught up with this, however, is the counter sense that it is the very abundance of condensations that usher in the lack. The uncertainty concerning ‘equivalence’ at this point is not surprising when taking into consideration Lacan’s original formulation:: ‘Il y a à cette bouche toutes les significations d’équivalence, toutes les condensations que vous voudrez. Tout se mêle et s’associe dans cette image, de la bouche à l’organe sexuel féminin’ (Lacan 1978: 186). The mouth has all the equivalent meanings you *will* want, to be sure, but also, all the meanings of equivalence. ‘Equivalence’ is itself constructed through equivalence. It does not escape the effects of its own structure, and ‘content’ and ‘form’ thus fail to keep at a safe distance from each other. I read in this the impossibility of shielding ‘equivalence’ from the touch of meaning, that is, from deferral. ⁱⁱⁱ

Crucially, my contention again is that the divisions of ‘equivalence’ cannot be questioned in Copjec’s account, because what are taken to be the two ‘parts’ of the dream must be kept distinct: however much the symbolic registers the real in the second part of the dream, there really can be nothing of the symbolic in Freud’s encounter with Irma’s throat. The force of Copjec’s subsequent argument is dependent on the certainty of separation at this point.

It is with this in mind that I turn again, and with renewed insistence, to what is, perhaps, the most obvious sense in which the symbolic returns to the spaces of the dream: *the encounter*

is always recounted. Freud flees the scene, but only from the perspective of Freud narrating this event; if the 'I' flees or looks, it is through the doubling of a narrating 'I' that is not doing these things. It is not only, as Lacan makes clear, that the fleeing of Freud cannot be taken in isolation from the dream, that state in which the motor discharge of flight is prohibited, but additionally that neither dream nor event can be separated in a reading from the linguistic frame. At certain stages, Lacan can be understood to acknowledge this, and Copjec herself repeats with approval Lacan's condemnation of the 'failure to distinguish the enunciative position of the dreaming patient from the stated position of the dreamed one' (Copjec [1994]: 24). For Copjec, analysis is, however, to focus on the 'space' of the dream, the 'second, Oedipalized space', for example (120). At issue, in my reading, is that this space is never somehow simply itself, constituted as it is within a retrospective narration, from a supplementary yet necessary perspective.

iv) The death drive that is not one

If we *are* to engage narrational frames, then an additional difficulty with the notion of a non-symbolic encounter is introduced: I take Copjec to read the account of the dream in terms of a structure that *insists*. The dream is divided into 'parts', repeating Lacan's 'Nous avons parlé de deux parties'; 'La phenomenology du rêve del'injection d'Irma nous a fait distinguer deux parties' (Lacan 1978:196). If this grants order to the narrative, and enables the first 'part' of the dream to be clearly differentiated from the second, it also undercuts this difference: the 'part' returns to both sides of the divide. This is equally true of 'climax'. At one stage, Lacan has 'culmine', and as with Copjec, the term is repeated (190). If the second half of the narrative is a fleeing from the real, with the first an encounter, both require 'climax' or 'culmine': 'the climax of the second part, the triumphant pronouncement of the word *trimethylamine*, indicates that it is the word itself, or the symbolic itself, that is our salvation' (Copjec [1994]: 120-121). Thus, the initial encounter with the real *obeys another law*, again the law of structure, a structure that insists across even the bar between the two 'parts'. What persists, and thus what cannot be contained within the individual part - that which somehow pertains to the 'part' of the real and that of the symbolic -, is 'part'.

In insisting, then, 'climax' and 'part' fall outside the 'space' that we have read Copjec to privilege within her analysis. It might be claimed, therefore, that what falls outside Copjec's 'space' is the narrational frame, what might be taken to be an enabling, meaning-making structure. On these terms, what is outside the 'space' – and in this I am referencing the spaces of the encounter with the real and the fleeing into the symbolic – *is the symbolic*. In this, the symbolic can, however, also be read as repetitive, and as unread by Copjec, and, in

this, a gap within the signifying chain of her text. 'Climax' and 'part' are not, then, only to be returned to the text as the comforting, naturalised, sense-making supports to narrative, but also as the symbolic as 'death drive', in so far as this is understood by Copjec to be incomplete, unmasterable and 'inextricably linked to repetition' (45– 46, 54). If 'climax' and 'part' are indeed read not in terms of a general structure transcending the particular 'spaces' of the dream, but rather as insisting terms within Freud's text, then the appeal to the death drive can be further refined. Again, taking up a familiar Žižekian reading, it might be argued that it is not different ideas about or instances of 'climax' that are repeated, but rather the signifier 'climax'.

Copjec's analysis can be read to move towards such an understanding, interested as it is in the problem of the signifier as it relates to the climax, but only, I would suggest, in a way that problematises its own grounds. Copjec argues that in 'the climax of the second part of the dream', as introduced above, the 'salvation' on offer is one of 'repetition [...] the signifier's repeated attempt – and failure – to designate itself [...]' (121). Again, this, it is claimed, is a defence against the real; what Copjec forwards as the 'correct response' to anxiety: not the symbolic as interpretation, but a deathly repetition that incorporates the real as that which is excluded. It follows from these formulations that the 'climax' is only itself, 'the word itself', but *in this is divided from itself*: the word '*trimethylamine*' is 'the climax'; there is the climax, and there is '*trimethylamine*', and somehow the one is also the other. Copjec's argument here is that the word remains nothing other than itself, yet this is a condition not easily achieved: as the 'climax' is located on the other side of the dream, in its first, purportedly non-symbolic half, what is to keep the '*trimethylamine*' that is 'the climax' from the 'part' of the real? A further, related, irony: it is the singularity of the word '*trimethylamine*' that, for Copjec, results in the repetition that defines the symbolic. It is clear that in this argument the word cannot author itself, that it has no authority, and it is this that demands the endless repetition that registers the real that it consistently avoids. As the word is 'the climax', however, it is, as I have been arguing, caught up in another repetition, one that does not coincide with the symbolic of the absurd, isolated word, the symbolic of the signifier, but, for example, extends out into the enabling, unread condition of naturalised structure, that of the literary 'climax' that is positioned as an excess to the 'spaces' of both the symbolic and the real. *Repetition does not keep to its right place*. It repeats, and in this compromises the repetition that Copjec's argument requires, the limited, deathly repetition of the absurd, isolated word within the space of the second half of the dream.

At this point a further difficulty still must be introduced: although Lacan does indeed repeat the term 'culmine', he does not stick to it in the way Copjec does 'climax'. Against the

structural, dynamic 'culmine', Lacan introduces the geographic, spatial 'sommet', as well as 'un acme'. Following Žižek one possible response to this would be to say that what we have here, again, really is nothing other than the insistence of the signifier across Copjec's text, that either the 'climax' that is repeated, or the chain of 'culmine', 'acme' and 'sommet', calls upon 'the master signifier', that point of pure difference that retrospectively occurs either when any given word is understood in various, contradictory ways, or through the displacement of synonyms. It might be suggested, therefore, that my fantasising analysis is unwittingly stuck in the 'historicist' play of the symbolic, caught up in the metonymical circuit of substitution, and thus unable to engage the additional 'metaphorical' dimension that is necessary to keep this in operation (the sense in which the deathless circuit of the symbolic carves out the real – that other dimension). To be clear, the problem with such a move is that it avoids Copjec's location of the insistence of the signifier in one 'climax': it is 'climax' as '*trimethylamine*', the seemingly unauthored, discrete term that necessitates repetition. *There cannot be another 'climax', at this stage of Copjec's argument, if there are to be other climaxes.* The symbolic must keep to its designated location as signifier, and not find repetition in, for example, a frame that is taken to fall outside the empty, meaningless repetition that defines the law and meaning. If we are to think of climax as 'master signifier', and thus as a site of pure difference, the difficulty is that difference must include the claim that there is no difference, no repetition, that there really is, indeed, one 'climax'.

To read the terms of the text is to disrupt the stated differences that must be in place for Copjec's argument to function, the sure designations of 'space', 'object', 'symbolic' that are necessary to the carving out of pure difference. 'Climax' might be the isolated word, but in this it is also: insistent; something other than itself; located in a structure that has no place in the space of the real or the symbolic; that which insists across the space of the real and the symbolic, but not as the insistent signifier.

To conclude: if Copjec's makes an unacknowledged appeal to structure in 'climax', there is a further appeal that is acknowledged: 'climax' as the unrealisable structure of death drive, what Žižek names the 'symbolic real'. There is, therefore, something that falls outside of that structure: 'climax' as the common or garden structure with which we began. It follows that there is an unrecognised structure that exceeds the place of what we might term the '*real/structure*', and thus, death drive- like – *exceeds the place of the death drive*. (Copjec [1994]: 1-14) 'Climax' is both that part of structure that is not part of structure (because passed over without comment), and that part of death drive which is (not) death drive (because it insists across what is and is not death drive). That is to say, I read 'climax' as the drive that cannot count as drive for there to be drive; the insistence that is not one. Within conventional

Žižekian and Copjecian analysis, there is, of course, crucially always an aspect of structure that does not count as such – ‘universal exception’ -, but in ‘Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety’ there is also a part of impossible structure that does not count as impossible structure; that which is not simply drive, and in this is drive, because drive is what is the same in all symbolic universes, including the symbolic frame of ‘death drive’.

v) Fleeing

It could be suggested that structure is problematic for Copjec in a more straightforward sense, as her argument requires a specific sequence of precisely constructed events that are difficult to square with the text of ‘Irma’s Injection’. In terms of Copjec’s reading of the dream, for example, it is crucial that there is an ‘anxiety-filled encounter with the object a’, that ‘the appearance of what ought to have remained hidden is a sickening, noxious sight’, experienced as a ‘constricted asphyxiating space’, and a ‘terrifying real’ from which Freud ‘flees’ and ‘turns’. Returning to Freud, however, I cannot read any specific appeal to anxiety, terror, revulsion, or constriction in the look down the throat. There is fear and restriction, but, remarkably, these are situated prior to the examination, ‘when she [Irma] answers: “If you only knew what pains I now have in the neck, stomach, and abdomen; I am drawn together” [...] I [Freud] am frightened and look at her.’ The constriction, for the narration, is in Irma’s claim to being tied or strung up (‘es schnürt mich zusammen’), and if Freud’s startled or fearful reaction is to be read as anxiety (‘Ich erschrecke und sehe sie an’), then, according to Copjec, this is prior to the encounter with ‘the real’. ^{iv} Anxiety is also prior to the look here, as Irma’s speaking of Freud’s failure to know her pain is the spur to his looking. Rather than located in the encounter with the imaginary real, that is, in Freud’s examination of Irma’s throat, fear can be read to coincide with not looking. Understood in this way, it is the other’s notification of a failed encounter, rather than the meeting with the abyss of the other, that provokes anxiety.

This move to secure location (the underside, we might argue, of the limit that is necessary to the brilliant, vertiginous readings Copjec offers [Copjec 2015, 39 - 63]) can be read also in the appeal to ‘flight’, ‘flee[ing]’, and ‘turning away’. Despite being the definitive actions within the ethics Copjec is proposing, I would argue that they are disruptively difficult to place. We might begin to work this through with the claim that the ‘second part of the dream is defined by a *turning away from* the object a that erupted in the first part’. What defines the second part of the dream is thus something that cannot be contained within it. There is a definition in excess of ‘part’. And as this definition is a turning away from a previous eruption, the second ‘part’ is ghosted by the first. It is not, then, that the second ‘part’ only repeats the first as

'part', as read above, but that there is a turning away that cannot be contained within either part. We read this difficulty again in the claim that 'The abruptness of the transition (from the anxious to the comic mode) means that Freud *flees* from the real – Irma, her white scabs, the unconscious – into the symbolic community of his fellow doctors' (120). Freud flees 'into' a symbolic community, and 'from' the real, and as such, this is a fleeing that insists across the division of 'parts'. Copjec's reading is rooted in a split between the real and the symbolic that is then explicitly problematised through the return of the real to the symbolic. I am suggesting, however, that there is something that must be added to both scenes, a fleeing and a turning away that is necessary to each, yet wholly situated in neither. Fleeing is not the real, within Copjec's analysis. It is a flight from the real. Fleeing is not the symbolic either, however, in so far as Copjec has Freud fleeing 'into' this. It is a flight that I read as an unread yet required excess both to the two scenes and the subsequent problematisation of their neat division within Copjec's account. In order to question the relationship between parts, Copjec must get safely to the point of danger, overlooking the supplement that is necessary, yet anathema, to her structure.

Such difficulties can be read also in the account of 'Irma's Injection' offered by Slavoj Žižek in *Less Than Nothing*. Such repetition should not, in one sense, surprise: Žižek is Copjec's most celebrated fellow traveller, who reviewed *Read My Desire* as 'theoretically correct', and his ideas, although kept at something of a distance thus far, have from the first shaped the debates with which this present article has engaged.^v As mentioned above, Copjec understands the dream to repeat across a diverse collection of texts, reading what is, I would argue, sometimes and sometimes not its constitute *nothing* insisting within *Dracula*, *La Jetée*, and *Rebecca*. Žižek also has repeated recourse to the dream. Like the little boy coerced into seeing his grandparents, or the gaze of Arbogast in *Psycho*, it is one of Žižek's favoured *examples*, a narrative to which he returns many times within his writing, its 'universality' claimed as established through its failure to exhaust or fully signify itself.^{vi} Within Žižek's writing, 'Irma's Injection' is most often called upon in discussions of fantasy. In 'From Virtual Reality to the Virtualisation of Reality' and 'Freud Lives', for example, the second part of the dream is understood as a maintenance of fantasy, an avoidance of the real, and this is taken to be repeated in Freud's account of a bereaved father woken by a horrifying dream in which his son confronts him with the words 'Father, can't you see I am burning'.^{vii} The father wakes up not to escape the dreaming fantasy, but to dwell in a reality that stands against the real of the dream. With this claim, a tension can be introduced between the understanding of the second scene in the work of Copjec and Žižek, with the former figuring it as a holding on to the real, rather than a more straightforward flight from it. In *Less Than Nothing*, however, Žižek offers a slightly extended account, which brings his reading more in line with Copjec's:

the dream is figured as split, and the real is located as much in the second part as it is the first. The reference is introduced within a discussion of the modalities of the negation of negation, in which Žižek introduces one variant, named 'the "Irma-matrix," the logic of which he claims 'underlies' Freud's dream of 'Irma's Injection' (Žižek 2013). The dream begins, writes Žižek, with a conversation between Freud and Irma, in the course of which:

Freud gets closer to her, approaches her face and looks deep into her mouth, confronting the horrible sight of the red flesh in her throat. At this point of unbearable horror, the tone of the dream changes, the horror all of a sudden passes into comedy [...] which enables the dreamer to avoid an encounter with the true trauma. It may appear that the triad of the 'Irma –matrix' is that of 'IRS': first the imaginary duality; then, its aggravation in the abyss of the Real; finally, the symbolic resolution. However, a more precise reading discloses the fact that we get two Reals in the dream, in that each of its two parts concludes with a figuration of the Real. In the conclusion of the first part [...] , this is obvious: the look into Irma's throat renders the Real in the guise of primordial flesh [...] in the second part, the comic symbolic exchange or interplay between the three doctors also ends up with the Real, this time in its opposite aspect – the Real of writing, of the meaningless formula of trimethylamine. The difference hinges on the different starting point: if we start with the imaginary (the mirror-confrontation of Freud and Irma), we get the Real in its imaginary dimension, as a horrifying primordial image that cancels imagery itself; if we start with the symbolic (the exchange of arguments between the three doctors), we get the signifier itself transformed into the Real of a meaningless letter or formula. These two figures are the two opposite aspects of the Real: the abyss of the primordial Life-Thing and the meaningless letter or formula [...] (Žižek, 2013, 479).

As with Copjec's reading, there is a division of the dream into two 'parts', with part not read as an issue within discussions of structure, and not implicated in what problematises the mundane division of the dream. This is held instead within the radical doubleness of the same, the notion that it is with pure repetition that the genuine difference arises; a difference that does not reside in finalised identity, but rather in the way in which the same narrative can, from a different starting point, result in opposing notions of the real. My issue is not necessarily with this understanding, but rather the reading of structure that it requires, one that, again, and ironically, can be read to repeat that offered by Copjec. Take for example, the claim that it is precisely at 'this point' of unbearable horror that the tone of the dream changes. Firstly, of course, we can question the location of unbearable horror within the look down the throat, but there are further issues here. What does it mean, for example, to locate the change in tone at the point of horror? This is a point of excess, located from a narrational

position other than its own, and holding within it the alteration that extends beyond its borders. Moreover, it is here, at this point, that 'the horror all of a sudden passes into comedy'. Again, this is a passage that cannot be wholly located on either side of the dream, and the horror of the first part strangely persists within the comedy that supplants it.

There is, however, a need for a cleaner separation between the two parts in Žižek's argument. As pointed out above, the pure difference of the structure hinges on the alternative points of entry: if we start with the part of the symbolic, we get one real, if we start with the imaginary part, we get another. But, as my reading of Copjec has already suggested, the ability to start in this way is far from secure: the symbolic starts already ghosted by the imaginary, just as the imaginary calls upon the symbolic, and not only in the wider sense of its retrospective narrative frame. Copjec and Žižek need to understand the dream to be structured in a certain way, and thus cannot admit readings that would disturb this structure.

It is my contention, then, that additions to the prescribed 'matrix' can be read, in so far as these *repeat* across the engagements with 'Irma's Injection' offered by Copjec and Žižek. As such, we can return a further addition to this repeated matrix: flight. To flee or to take flight, Copjec argues, is to repeat, and to repeat is to flee. Or, more precisely, fleeing is not the real, as it is a flight from the real, yet fleeing is also the real, the real of unsublimated repetition. As such, fleeing, within Copjec's analysis, can also be read in terms of the repetition of 'Irma's Injection' in and across the work of both theorists. But fleeing, in my reading, also puts pay to the security of the structural opposition that, in its repetition and problematisation, forms the 'Irma Matrix': *flight explodes the matrix into which it can be subsumed*. I am thinking here of flight as a structure that is an affront to structure: repeated, persistent, differentiated, yet a pure difference too; flight as the very repetitive structure of the death drive, yet returning to upset even *this* affront to structure; flight not only as symbolic real, and symbolic against the real, but what persists across both, problematising even the established problematisation of their opposition; flight repeated, we might say, in the fleeing of Copjec and Žižek from the problem of flight, a flight from flight, and thus, perhaps, a repetition of it; flight as the displacement and repetition of Irma as *Dracula*, the dream of the burning child, and the like, the flight from interpretation; my repetition of (flight from) this in the shift of focus from Copjec to Žižek; the flight (under-read in this present article) from 'flee[ing] to 'turning away'.

Another way to think about flight here might call upon Freud's celebrated discussion within 'Irma's Injection' of 'the navel of the dream': an impediment to, and a promise of, further

analysis; a knot that cannot be unravelled. But here a further, and, for this article, final, difficulty can be introduced.

vi) Conclusion: omphalus

Thus far, I have only briefly touched upon the rejection of deconstruction shared by Copjec and Žižek in their discussions of 'Irma's Injection'. In 'The Limits of Hegel', however, there is particular commitment to give Jacques Derrida his due. Thus, deconstruction is taken to follow a Freudian investment in contingency that draws attention to the limits of a certain dialectic approach:

'What would Hegel have made of Freud's dream of Irma's injection, the interpretation of which unearths a kind of *superposition* of multiple interpretative lines [...] what would Hegel have said about a dream in which the remains of the day (*Tagesreste*) are connected to the core of the dream only through verbal or similar associations?' (487)

Difficulties arise, it is claimed, only in so far deconstructive analysis limits itself to reading 'endless difference, the dissemination that can never be sublated or re-appropriated' (482), to the exclusion of:

The virtual in its proper dimension, as a possibility which already *qua* possibility possesses its own reality; pure difference is not actual, it does not concern different actual properties of a thing or differences among things, its status is purely virtual, it is a difference which takes place at its purest precisely when nothing changes in actuality (481 – 2).

Žižek is working here not to simply shore up such oppositions, but to draw out the 'virtual' structural aspects necessary to Freudian contingency, and the pathology that returns to Hegelian formality (480 -90). It is this operation that leads finally to an engagement with the strange logic of Lacanian drive, figured in terms of the Mobius band.^{viii} For Žižek, drive, as opposed to desire, does not turn around a missing object, as 'for a drive, the "Thing itself" is a circulation around the void (or rather, the hole)'. (498) This might suggest the triumph of pure formality, a movement finding satisfaction in itself alone, and thus requiring no pathological 'content'. The truth is the opposite: such geometry is caught up in 'the paradox' that 'that pure repetition [...] is sustained precisely by its impurity, by the persistence of a contingent pathological element to which the movement of repetition gets and remains stuck' and it is in this way that, 'at its most radical, the Lacanian object *a* [...] is not a substantial element disturbing the formal mechanism of symbolization, but a purely formal curvature of

symbolization itself' (500). Drive, the excess pleasure of the movement around the pure difference of the single-sided Mobius strip, might seem to do away with the contingent differences in which Derrida is taken to be invested, yet this is to avoid the contingent or pathological aspect of the movement, the sense in which it is like a record stuck within a particular groove: 'every idealizing /universalizing negativity has to be attached to a singular, contingent, "pathological" content which serves as its *sinthome* in the Lacanian sense (if the *sinthome* is unravelled or disintegrated, universality disappears)' (501).

Thinking back over the various accounts of 'Irma's Injection' read thus far, we are in a position to draw out certain tensions. Thus, for example, the real, for Copjec, is constriction, yet the repetition she positions against this is, for Žižek, attached to the knot of the *sinthome*. Knot against knot. If in one sense this supports Copjec's reading, with its notion of the real returning as the symbolic flight from the real, it also, as it were, introduces a further loop to the knot of flight, an additional contingency to disrupt the sure structure required to stage Copjec's elegant reversals. Alternatively, we could turn to the death drive, which, for Žižek here, is a "sticking", an interruption of 'flow', with flight seemingly the opposite of this. For Copjec, in contrast, flight/fleeing/turning away is repetition as death drive (501). *Pharmakon*, then: an original division; read across both theorists, flight is and is not 'immobilization' (503). Might one not be increasingly tempted at this juncture to call upon 'the navel of the dream'? Not so for Žižek and Copjec. For all their interest in 'Irma's Injection', the limit of discourse, and the structure of the dream, neither theorist mentions that particular knot.

It is at this point that we might turn to a text (published two years after *Read my Desire*) that is not mentioned by Žižek, surprisingly, one might think, considering his interest in repetition, the constitutive limit, origin as impossible difference, knots, and the limits of Derridan analysis: Derrida's *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*. If, in 'The Limits of Hegel', Žižek seems to be at his most open to the possibilities of the deconstructive project, might we nevertheless read here a turning away or a flight from it? Perhaps not: there is, after all, no horrified recoil on Žižek's part. What we have instead is arguably a non-encounter with Derrida and 'the navel of the dream' that is the focus of his reading of 'Irma's Injection' in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*. There are limits to this line of argument, however, best introduced through a quotation from Derrida's text:

[...] when one seeks to determine the unity of this concept ['resistance'], which serves as a semantic support or paradigmatic reference for the five forms of resistance, one encounters a 'resistance to analysis' that figures *both* the most resistant resistance, resistance par excellence, hyperbolic resistance, *and* the one that disorganizes the very principle, the constitutive idea of psychoanalysis as analysis of resistances [...]

The paradox that interests me here is that this repetition compulsion, as hyperbolic paradigm of the series, as absolute resistance, risks destroying the meaning of the series to which it is supposed to assure meaning (this is an effect of formal logic [...]), but still more ironically, it defines no doubt a resistance that has no meaning – and that, moreover, is not a resistance [...] the repetition compulsion does not give its meaning to the four other forms of resistance for two reasons: it has no meaning (death drive) and it resists analysis in the form of non-resistance, for the primary reason it is *itself of an analytic structure or vocation* [...] We have here returned very close to the navel of the dream, to the place where the desire for death and desire *tout court* call for and speak the analysis they prohibit, speak to it by saying nothing, respond without responding, without saying *yes* or *no*, as in ‘Bartleby the Scrivener’. To every demand, question, pressure, request, order it responds without responding, neither active nor passive ‘I would prefer not to’ (23 - 24).

Derrida, so close to the navel, was surely never more Žižekian. Rather than turning from questions of formal logic, as both Žižek and Copjec claim in their chapters is the case with deconstruction, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* engages precisely the problem of the ‘universal exception’ that is central to their work. The exception here is without content or meaning: very much the Žižekian and Copjecian death drive. And the ethics that are read from this are those of Melville’s hero, with Derrida quoting the words that have, of course, become something of a catchphrase for Žižek, an encapsulation of the political project he wishes to pursue: ‘I would prefer not to’. For sure, this ends in the navel, and thus introduces a limit that is off-limit to both Copjec and Žižek, both as a repressed that I have returned, and a dense, primary textual *différance* that seems at odds with the neat impossibility of the Mobius strip. For all that, such differences do not enable us to entirely or confidently turn from questions of repetition, resistance, turning, and flight.

I am not, at this late stage, about to take up a position within the Derrida/Lacan debates (Žižek 2011; Sigler 2010; Hurst 2008; Ziarek 1997; Johnson 1977). Yes: I take flight. I will conclude, instead, only with the following questions. Are we, in light of our analysis of Copjec’s ‘Irma’s Injection’, to read Žižek’s discussion of Derrida in ‘The Limits of Hegel’ as a flight of *avoidance* or of *fidelity*? When we think through this choice, should we call upon ‘sticking’, ‘fleeing’, ‘constricting’, ‘turning away’, a combination of the four, or something else? What law should we follow in this choice? How confident are we in the separation of these actions? Is flight here what secures opposition (for example: Derrida/Žižek; the mouth/the doctors), or what also makes impossible such sure divisions (flight as unacknowledged supplement to structure, or ‘universal exception’)? And if impossibility is indeed enabled by

flight as death drive/ pure repetition/formality, what is to ensure the separation of this operation from other contingencies, and from contingency *in general*?

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Notes

ⁱ I have kept to Copjec's formulation of 'the real' rather than 'the Real'.

ⁱⁱ Reformulated in the terms favoured by Copjec: how, with the knowledge that if 'we delve below [the superficial/symbolic], we are sure to come up empty' (13), can we be sure that 'appearance and being never coincide' (13)? I am not questioning this line of argument in general, but, rather, suggesting that any real that is to be read in the way must also fail to coincide with the real: there is an underside even to this underside.

ⁱⁱⁱ I do not read Copjec's 'equivalence' as that of Laclau. Copjec's formulations, within the chapter that concerns this present article, suggests a positive, content-based 'equivalence' (Copjec 2016: 118). For a tentative reading of this issue, see Cocks (2020).

^{iv} See Freud [1900]. For a detailed reading of English translation of 'Irma's Injection', see Mahony (2001.)

^v The question of the same is, of course, what is at issue. I am very much caught in what I critique throughout (*flight?*), but at this stage, what problematises my reading is its implicit appeal to shared grounds (that is: *nothing*) between these theorists. The quotation from the back cover blurb of Copjec (2015).

^{viii} See, for example, Žižek (2009c: 101 -3); Flisfeder (2012).

^{vii} Another article (at least) could be written on the repetition of 'Irma's Injection' in Žižek, but see also Žižek (2008), Žižek (2008b: 25), where the imaginary real is read in terms of a 'mask of horror', and Žižek and Milbank (2009), where the dream, is taken to be repeated in the Book of Job. I acknowledge here also that much more could be written on the 'virtual' structure of Irma's Injection within Žižek (2013).

^{viii} A move shared by Copjec (2015).