Politicizing Cognition: 
Antigone, Yogācāra, and the Politics of Not One Less 

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Abstract  
In recent critiques of Žižek’s revolutionary politics, the ethical act as exemplified by Antigone has figured as a typical example of the excessiveness of Žižek’s approach. Žižek’s insistence on Antigone’s act of pure desire is suspected either of privileging irrational blind faith or of indulging in passive withdrawal from the domain of practice. Zhang Yimou’s film, Not One Less, seems to follow the terms set up by such critiques. Minzhi, the protagonist, displays unmitigated persistence in pursuing duties given to her as a substitute teacher. On the other hand, the story also unfolds as a blatantly conformist affirmation of the benevolence of post-Maoist state power. Minzhi, in so far as she acts in her symbolic role, is both too uncritical of the paternal authority behind her act and too powerless in the face of the flexibility of a system which comfortably hides social inequality behind fortuitous good will. This study argues, however, that a political reading of Not One Less should not stop at such apparent conformism. Indeed, both the reading of blind obedience and that of conformism assume direct causal connection between the ethical act and social/political practice. In Not One Less, however, there is a gap of causal uncertainty indicating that Minzhi’s act, though fully immersed in conformist practice, does open up a degree of cognitive freedom within the very uncertainty of causative agency. I will use the theory of “three natures” in Yogācāra thought to further examine how such uncertainty indicates the presence of a cognitive ethics which points to a different kind of causality in much the same way as the Lacanian/Žižekian act. Here effectivity is more radical because less predictable.  

Keywords  
Not One Less, Antigone, the political act, Yogācāra, causality
What analytic discourse dislodges puts truth in its place, but does not shake it up. It is reduced, but indispensable.

In all probability the situation is this: before we transcend ourselves in love and enter into the life and the often alien rhythm of another human being, we experiment early on with basic rhythms that proclaim themselves in their simplest forms in these sorts of games with inanimate objects. Or rather, these are the rhythms in which we first gain possession of ourselves.
—Benjamin, “Toys and Play” 120

The knowledge of those who understand others’ cittas [minds] is not like an object. And how is this? As in the case of a knowledge of one’s own citta.
—Vasubandhu, *Vimśatikā-Kārikā* 21a
(Anacker 174)

**Remembering the World**

The psychoanalytic view of human reality may be described as one which situates itself within the conscious subject and strives to move beyond its confines, or rather to achieve some kind of communication with the beyond, or at least the psychic representation or translation of the beyond. What is often forgotten is the fact that although the novelty of the Freudian “discovery,” and Lacan’s return to its fundamentals, is justifiably valued because of the knowledge to be gained from discursive measurings and readings of the uncanny, the undecipherable, the unknown, the psychoanalytic view has never departed from the clinical supposition that what finally counts are the concrete persons (analyst and analysand) involved in the analytic situation. On this view, every bit of new knowledge and new performativity takes effect only when it can be returned to the finitude of the humble subject of the everyday world, perhaps without the metaphysical pretensions of the “Cartesian” cogito, but without the illusion, either, that the distance between the material and the psychical can now safely be considered a
distortion of reality, as if we have arrived at a place from which everything must now appear as merely “immanent” to the same field.¹

The importance of this point is borne out in Dany Nobus’ discussion of Lacan’s turn to topology as an alternative to structural linguistics when limitations of the latter became apparent in terms of its usefulness as a theoretical reference model. Nobus regrets that Lacan did not live long enough to effect a final turn, or return, in his thought after his late admission that the abstract, structuralizing metaphors of topology may have failed after all to explain everything. What would have been realized in this final turn is the position that the “interference” of common meaning cannot be simply dispensed with and that a new, perhaps non-structuralist approach to language and speech is needed (64 f). Recently, Lorenzo Chiesa also proposes that the usual complaints about the unreadability of Lacanian exposition miss the point that Lacanian thinking is “paradoxically systematic”: under the surface of systematicity and departing from the presentation of thought as completed and closed, Lacan insists on recording the almost mechanical grinding of the thinking process, the “work-in-progress” inevitably accompanied by “questions, doubts, and dead ends” as well as rich possibilities of digressive “rediscussion” (4; original emphasis). This idea of Lacan symptomatically enacting the object of knowledge in his enunciative style highlights the fact that even when topology is in principle adopted as the major reference model, and even when the discursive context is removed from the clinical session to the seminar room, Lacan never really did away with certain constraints set down by the psychoanalytic model as understood by him: he was never too far away from the position that the practice of theory cannot be divided from the subject of finitude, and thus has to be taken up as necessarily embedded within the gaps and uncertainties entailed by embodied procedures of language and speech.

On Lacan’s use of topology, Nobus concludes somewhat ambiguously that although topology “may have taken Lacan to the real heart of the psychoanalytic experience, it also drove him away from its necessary means and principal power” (65). Here Nobus is referring to the structural instantiation of the unconscious in non-spherical topology as the “real heart of psychoanalytic experience,” and to the way such abstraction is actualized in speech and language as “its necessary means

¹ Admittedly, the distance in question is usually presented as metaphorically belonging to a common space. Lacan, for example, distinguishes psychoanalytic practice from hypnosis by pointing to the necessity, in analysis, to maintain “the distance between the I—identification—and the a” (Four Fundamental Concepts 273). The important point, however, is that such distance is precisely what defines the cogito as positioned within finitude, necessarily dependent on some “other” to have a minimal grasp of the whole.
and principal power.” The qualified statement is understandable since there is no simple way to distinguish the “real heart” of experience from its power to affect the actual. All one can say is that the necessary part played by the latter has not received sufficient attention in a structural approach modeled on mathematical formalization. Due to the nature of psychoanalytic experience, it has never been a question of the concrete situation being forgotten or refound, claimed or reclaimed, but one of the need to modify distances, to reposition a specific mode of knowledge within theoretical discourse.

The uniqueness of this “paradoxical” model of knowledge will not be diminished but can hopefully be explicated by referring to a similar situation from an entirely different culture and context. Chakravarti Ram-Prasad discusses two types of religious thought, distinguishing them by observing how much authority is attributed to the teacher who has achieved enlightenment. Most theistic religions give priority to revelation (through sacred texts or human mediators) since the direct appeal to higher powers is a good way to ward off epistemic vagaries introduced by the human transmission of knowledge (147).2 Buddhism, on the other hand, denies revelation by investing liberatory authority entirely in the insight achieved by the enlightened person; such insight is in principle ineffable:

The authority of the Buddha consists in his having actually gone, from being like other human beings, through to some state that gave content to his teachings. His having undergone that transformation and his activity in consequence together render his teachings authoritative. . . . The difficulty lies in the nature of that state which he attained and which his teachings are meant to take us to. For something about what he underwent seems to block the very possibility of his being able to teach about it. (148)

Enlightenment, in Buddhism, consists in the realization that the self is without substance and that believing in the substance of the self is the cause of suffering, but when enlightenment is based on the acts and experiences of a separate self and is therefore personal, this very personal enlightenment would seem to be built on the illusion that there is self-substance. This is the source of the drive to produce the endless stream of doctrinal compilations, translations and exegeses in much of later Buddhism: knowledge betrays its own formation within uncertainty if it is

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2 The Mīmāṃsā school of Hinduism is unusual in conceiving revelation as “authorless,” that is, validated not by any theistic being but by “the very structure of reality” (Sam-Prasad 147).
positioned as revelation. Similarly, since one begins with the finitude of the person rather than with revelation, whoever claims to have reached the “beyond” cannot dwell there lest it become an enslaving, personal beyond, but instead has to incessantly return to the unenlightened or pre-enlightened world, as if there is a need to show that there is still minimal (sharable) revelation to be found within the very confines of the finite self. The assumption is that when verbal guidance is given and followed, it is indeed possible to find a way to approach this reduced, “extimate” version of the beyond within the subject.

Ram-Prasad’s formulation points to the circularity between ineffability and sharability which is a persistent issue in Buddhist soteriology. He specifically associates this issue with the preoccupations of the Yogācāra school, best known as the school of Buddhism that has gone to great lengths in elaborating a Buddhist psychology (148-51). Although a full comparative study of Yogācāra philosophy and psychoanalysis cannot be taken up here, we can point to at least some superficial similarities between this soteriological dilemma and the epistemic circularity pinpointed by Nobus’ discussion of the inadequacy of the topological reference model and Chiesa’s explanation of Lacan’s expository style. In both cases, there is a need to return to, or maintain connection with, the supposedly uninteresting finitude of the world of everyday practice, a need to be lingering in the world, of “tarrying with the negative,” after arriving at the beyond. Again, here I have to limit myself to a few more concrete areas of discursive correspondence. Specifically I will focus on certain affinities between political agency and soteriological agency which may point to new articulatory possibilities. I will begin with some recent debates on the political effectivity of psychoanalytic discourse occasioned by Slavoj Žižek’s attempt to unfold Lacanian theory into a revolutionary politics.

**Žižek, the Lacanian Act, and Partial Freedom**

The idea of the ethical act figures prominently in Žižek’s accounts of how revolutionary politics is still possible in presumably post-revolutionary times. Following Lacan, Žižek explains the act as activity that no longer remains mere activity but introduces something alien and monstrous, to effect a “traversing” of fantasy, a “disturbing” of the “phantasmic background” supporting the stabilized

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3 For some other general accounts of the Yogācāra school of Buddhist thought in English see Waldron, Nagao, Wood, Jiang, and Hase 1984a, 1984b.
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ideological world (Ticklish 374).\footnote{There have been subtle turns and shifts on the many occasions when Žižek has elaborated on the idea of the ethical act and its political or other variants. We cannot go into details here; for a useful summary, see Butler 66-94.} Recent critiques of Žižekian politics have taken much issue with its excessive irrationalism and its falling back on outdated European values.\footnote{“Subordination, exclusivity, hierarchy and violence” are given as some of these values in Robinson and Tomay 105. Among other things, Žižek is taken to task for favoring “a glorification of conflict, antagonism, terror and a militaristic logic of carving the field into good and bad sides, as a good in itself” (96). Another typical characterization states that Žižek repeats the terms of “the postmodern couplet of cynical distance and irrational fundamentalism” (Boucher 44).} Among such critiques, I will be concerned with a few directed specifically at Žižek’s reading of the ethical act as exemplified by Antigone. This reading, enlarging on elements already present in Lacan’s reading in the seventh seminar, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, is taken to be a paradigmatic case of the excessiveness of Žižek’s approach. The insistence on Antigone’s act of pure desire is suspected either of privileging blind faith and therefore political absolutization, or of passive conformism, taken up with a negative conception of the real and the impossible which removes it from the domain of practice. Thus Russell Grigg questions Žižek’s reading of Antigone’s no-saying to Creon as the quintessential moment of absolute freedom. Grigg argues that Antigone’s no-saying signifies only a symptomatic position, a yes-saying of the hysterical woman to her father’s desire. The high point of Sophocles’ play, on this account, should be located, rather, in the protagonist’s lamentation about her destiny. Then, and only then, may Antigone be said to be choosing to assume her destiny in full acceptance of the consequences of her act. This choice transforms what up to then has been a “symptomatic position,” determined not by ethical resistance but by a desire to obey more absolute laws, into something else. This something else is, however, not some spectacular intimation of revolutionary possibilities or political disruptions, but a calmer kind of ethical awareness of one’s individual being. In Grigg’s words, Antigone attains “a new relationship to her womanhood” (“Absolute” 191).

This is surely a useful reminder of the realities of the text, confirmed by Lacan’s repeated references to beauty and splendor in his discussion of the play in the seventh seminar. It is true that for Lacan Antigone’s “splendor” is one that is “unbearable” because of a going “beyond the limits of the human” (Lacan Ethics 247, 263), but one may still say that if there is absolute freedom in Antigone’s act, as affirmed by Žižek, it is too absolute, removed as it is from the human and therefore uselessly absolute if not downright symptomatic. Instead of providing access to a reservoir of disruptive revolutionary energies, as Žižek insists it will,
Antigone’s act of suicidal opposition to Creon is too pathological to serve any practical purpose.

What matters ethically, to follow Grigg’s argument, is Antigone’s assumption of her destiny. That destiny might have as its source something removed from the human, but since this something is knowable to us only when it has been determined in a particular way (as “inhuman” for example), it cannot serve the revolutionary purpose Žižek is claiming for it. In short, Antigone’s act may still pertain to freedom in some way, but Žižek is forcing ethical clarity and political necessity on it, for such acts are free on condition that their freedom is determined by some non-gratuitous causes and therefore not absolute: the act is free or gratuitous in relation to “a particular form, or determination, of the Other. It will be free from its strictures, gratuitous from its point of view, criminal in its eyes, and perhaps unaccountable and unpredictable within its framework” (Grigg, “Absolute” 193).

It should be noted that Žižek is not unaware of the need to mitigate the too “pure” desire for the absolute. In fact, he exposes himself to polemical fire from many directions precisely by insisting, in The Puppet and the Dwarf and elsewhere, that the theological absolutism of Christianity is only superficially absolute, propped by a “perverse core” which reflects and connects the absoluteness of the beyond back to the secular world. This perversity is manifested above all in the principle of “a violent passion to introduce a Difference, a gap in the order of being, to privilege and elevate some object at the expense of others” (Žižek, Puppet 33). This insistence on differentiality is based, again, on the idea of the Lacanian act, here explained as the opposite of the Buddhist “mystical suspension of ties which bind us to ordinary reality.” For Žižek, this “mystical suspension of ties” is the correct target of the accusations of passive conformism which have been mistakenly directed at him. The Lacanian act, Žižek would say, does not pursue nirvana but insists on disturbing fantasy in the real world: it is “the very gesture by means of which the Void is disturbed, and Difference (and, with it, false appearance and suffering) emerges in the world” (22). If, as Grigg points out, the freedom of the act cannot escape determination by a merely different form of the Other, then the reply of The Puppet and the Dwarf seems to be: precisely, but not just another

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6 Here Žižek speaks of the bodhisattva’s compassionate return to the world after attaining nirvana as closer to the Lacanian act (22). I would certainly take issue with Žižek’s flattened understanding of Buddhism; he is working on the wrong level, treating Buddhism as a “school” of thought and the bodhisattva as a deviant cadre, whereas real Buddhism exists on a different terrain where there are indeed many ways to “privilege and elevate” different aspects of the fundamental doctrine with no less passion and violence than Žižek shows for Christianity.
Other but one in which its central grounding in lack, embodied in the perverse object, is made much more visible.

Nor is this “perverse” reading of the act entirely new. In *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, the main reference of Grigg’s discussion, the act receives the usual characterizations, but also something already pointing in the direction of perversity. The act is said to be positioned on the “zero point,” the point of “symbolic suicide” at which, indeed, ties to the normal world are cut off and the subject is excluded from the “intersubjective circuit” of the Other to actualize a state of “loss of loss” or renunciation of renunciation (Žižek, *Enjoy* 43 f). At the same time, Žižek does define this zero point as a liminal state from which one returns: the zero point is not a point of terminal suicide but a point one passes (almost as in a rite of passage) before taking up a new beginning, “a new social link” (45). That is why one “accomplishes” an activity, but “undergoes” an act, the latter being that which “involves a kind of temporary eclipse, *aphanisis*, of the subject” (44). In other words, while the act is mainly explicated as a gesture of withdrawal, Žižek has never lost sight of its openness to a “perverse” turn, a fall back into the world of the symbolic Other.

It does seem that Žižek’s reading in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* moves further away from withdrawal, but we need to bear in mind that perversity (in formal terms “thorough turning”) still implies an about-turn, a turn from outside in, without which the “Void” cannot be disturbed and the production of difference cannot properly begin. In other words, although the zero point is a point of the vanishing mediator, it is the passage through this point that makes all the difference. And this zero point is still a point of freedom: the act is “grounded in the abyss of a free decision” (Žižek, *Puppet* 21). This is another case of the “paradoxically systematic”: precisely when one has passed through the abyss of the absolutely free is one in a better position to enter the pathological world without being blindly subjected to the pathology of the systematic. The paradox lies in the fact that here, too, ineffability and sharability cannot simply be excluded from each other: the unspeakable is indispensable in that it has to become the beginning of (reductive) transformations which would serve to renew the connections between the abyssal Void and the more humanized world of Difference.

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7 Here Žižek’s position can be read as an implicit response to Walter Benjamin’s sketchy elaborations on divine violence (1996), which Werner Hamacher explicates through the idea of the “imperformative or aAfformative political event,” which, being aAfformative rather than performative, takes place in an abyssal formlessness not unlike the “zero point” of the Lacanian act; see esp. Hamacher 115, 128fn12.
Now we can return to the case of Antigone. The fact that Antigone goes "beyond the limits of the human" also means that her form of determination by the Other cannot be indistinct from any other form: the experience of having been beyond the limits provides a cognitive edge which is nevertheless not abstract but embodied in memory, capable of interacting with elements of the symbolic or "phantasmic" networks of the everyday world. Actions ("activity") are accomplished with or without undergoing the act, and, to be true to Žižek’s account, it is this undergoing which subjects the ideological ego to real determinations, opening up the possibility of a radical reordering of one’s world: “the act in its traumatic tuche is that which divides the subject who can never subjectivize it, assume it as ‘his own,’ posit himself as its author-agent . . .” (Ticklish 374). Thus the frequent complaint that Antigone leaves one Other for another Other, opposes one law (Creon, power, the community) but succumbs to another (Oedipus, Até, family) ignores the mediating passage through the act and risks a flattening of triangulation into the simple dichotomy between the absolute and the relative. When one begins with the acknowledgement of human finitude, freedom is in principle out of the reach of human knowledge (ineffable), but the same acknowledgement dictates that this gap cannot be universalized into a knowable principle of the aporetic either. This "systematic" paradoxicality is the basis on which we can say that the freedom of the Lacanian act is necessarily limited because accompanied by a forced choice not unlike the choice between freedom and death as expounded by Lacan in the eleventh seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*: one has to “choose” the knowable world in order to maintain some form of access to the unknowable, because one “cannot choose ‘the reason for living’ without losing it at the same time” (Zupančič 231). In Žižek this forced choice seems to be “absolutized” into a sphere of “free decision,” but, following Grigg’s argument, the “loss of loss” cannot really lose all since this loss, being of *that* loss and determined by it, cannot but gain some remainder of *that* loss, hence the necessary “perversity” of turning this absolute freedom into something else. In this sense, Grigg’s criticism is to the point but not enough. For Žižek, this necessary determination by the Other belongs to the general structure of subjectivity and is no longer an issue in the case of Antigone. What is peculiar in Antigone, rather, is her fundamentally incommunicable experience, the experience of having crossed the limits and being unable to return to the world except through textual representation.

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8 Zupančič also compares this passive “undergoing” of encounters with the impossible of the real to the contingent nature of the event which, as Alain Badiou stresses, “happens to us” (235).
Zupančič explains the difference between desire and the drive by pointing out that desire sustains itself in the impossibility of satisfaction while the drive always solves such impossibility by finding satisfaction “elsewhere” (242). This blind satisfaction explains how the “loss of loss” is connected back to its uninflected half: desire dwells on the gap between the possible and the impossible, seeking and finding everything “not it”; the drive, on the other hand, “happens to us” and transforms the impossibility of desire into an “elsewhere.” In the consumption of food, for example, “in spite of the fact that the object we consume will never be ‘it,’ some part of ‘it’ is produced in the very act of consumption” (243). “It” is still located elsewhere, but a “part” now enters the picture and provides a dependency linking everyday practice to the jouissance of the mouth. The experience of the drive, however, is “beyond the analysis” and is “approachable only at the level of the analyst” (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 273 f), which means that the analyst, as one who has “undergone” the experience of the drive and has taken up a position of authority regarding that experience, can no longer abide in “pure desire” but has to return to the partial and the dependent; hence Lacan’s much quoted statement: “The desire of the analyst is not a pure desire” (276).

For Zupančič, the point here is not that desire is at some point “replaced” by the drive as Lacan’s main concern: “even if the drive is in some way the ‘goal’ of the analytic process, one cannot choose it directly, ‘instead of’ desire and its logic. In order to arrive at the drive, one must pass through desire and insist on it until the very end” (239). The analyst, facing the same dilemma as the Buddha in having to communicate something whose nature blocks its very communicability, can only resort to partial or reduced forms,. Such forms do not exist “elsewhere”: they exist precisely within the limits of “the law.” The key, therefore, is not to communicate in the usual sense of transporting messages, but (for the analysand) to retrace the paths of desire without which the remainders of the impossible hidden within the possible cannot emerge.

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9 Significantly, this impure desire, “a desire to obtain absolute difference,” intervenes where there may be “the signification of a limitless love” (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 276): here Lacan speaks not of “a limitless love” but of its reduction into a “signification.” Limitless love lives only “outside the limits of the law” (276), but the analyst works within such limits, presumably through the “signification” of such love.

10 The analyst’s role is, therefore, not that of the educator or advisor but that of an observer who maintains only the general “framework” of this retracing of the paths, who steps in only when the analysand’s desire is in danger of becoming lost. Otherwise “it is the subject [the analysand] that does the work.” The analyst’s desire is, therefore, “to leave the way open to the subject’s own desire” (Grigg, “Signifier” 113).
Até as Cognitive Drive

In terms of practical effectivity, such patient, almost ontogenetic, working through of the impossible is a serious threat to social and political agency, but the stakes of the psychoanalytic position lie precisely in the posited need to return to the place where one can question, from the point of the absolutely free, the “reason for living” before taking up other reasons as if we were free agents. Lacan indicates as much when he uses the word Até to describe the necessary subjection of the subject to “something that began to be articulated before him in previous generations”; this is an Até which “does not always reach the tragic level of Antigone’s Até” but is always “closely related to misfortune” (Lacan, *Ethics* 300). Freedom cannot but remain partial because the object of freedom, that which freedom breaks free from, lies both inside and outside of the physical individual. In whatever form, it is by definition formed “before” the individual is born and so may always be taken to be just another, numerically countable, form of the Other, but at the same time, Antigone’s Até is also an object that in some sense is proper to the individual by constituting a singular lineage of “previous generations” that belongs to no one else.

As the context of the Oedipus myth shows, this Até is paradoxical in that it is a blind drive placed beyond the limits of cognitive access, but at the same time a cognitive drive, a drive “to solve an enigma, to know the truth” (272). This cognitive dimension constitutes a particular kind of effectivity that is open to the “misfortune” of being, complete with an unknowability beyond the singularity of contingent experience enclosed within the protagonist’s physical body. Such effectivity, however, is also the source of a limitless power the mere remainders of which, knowable through a kind of “strange relation between the hero and the community,” can be “transmitted” in the fully symbolic sphere of public knowledge (Shepherdson, “Of Love” 71).

My pointing to the cognitive as an important dimension is based on the belief that the cognitive, the knowing of (or in) the body which connects to the “thinking” beyond the confines of the individual, is the place where the remainders of the impossible emerge through the drive. While cognition has long been associated with attempts to explain mental phenomena in terms of disembodied algorithmic processes, an alternative model is provided by research on “embodied cognition,” cognition as at least partially determined by the body of the organism (Shapiro 168; see also Varela et al.). The peculiarly psychoanalytic take on cognition consists not only in its concern with an unconscious “that engenders psychic life and virtually
makes subject and cognition possible” (Schleifer et al. 156) but in its insistence on the continuing relevance of processes inseparably connected to the realm of bodily impulses, residual memories, and phantasmic constructions. Žižek invokes Hegel’s characterization of the “night of the world” to explain this realm of inchoate forms: psychoanalytic experience is determined by the necessity of subjectivity to emerge out of this realm and therefore to be built upon “the traces of the traumatic passage from this ‘night of the world’ into our ‘daily’ universe of logos” (Žižek, “Cartesian” 259).

Thus, the paradoxical point to make here is that the cognitive pertains to the body, the mind, and the beyond. This has some bearing on the issues of the ethical act and the political. When Stavrakakis denies Antigone’s usefulness as a model of political effectivity (173 f), he is assuming an absolute distinction between body and mind, disparaging the latter as ineffective in the face of real oppression. I have mentioned Grigg’s argument that the significance of Antigone’s act lies in the achieving of a “new relationship to her womanhood” which retroactively transforms her hysteric’s position into what seems to be one of the ethical choice. This transformation, however, may also be taken, in Stavrakakis’ terms, as a distancing from concrete resistance, a dwindling of effectivity into intrapsychic abstraction (self-relating in the vicinities of a womanhood behind or above the woman). Indeed, for Antigone as for other Sophoclean tragic protagonists, there is no possibility of change in a situation where “everything is there from the beginning” (Stavrakakis 173; Lacan, Ethics 271). Hence Stavrakakis’ contention that since Antigone desires death and is positioned as already dead, as indeed stressed in Lacan’s reading, her pure desire amounts to an inability to act, a gesture of complicity with the powers that be. On this reading, Antigone’s act is a “lure” to death, something that, being sustained by the structures of fantasy, has to be “traversed” for there to be real transgression of the law, and this is precisely what Lacan did in a later seminar in correction of his earlier reading (Stavrakakis 175 f).

What is involved here is not just the possibility or feasibility of “de-Oedipalizing” the subject in the name of preserving political effectivity. The issue is already one of eliminating the cognitive dimension of psychoanalysis. Antigone’s overcoming of her symptomatic position is in the most simple terms an act of knowing: she “knows what she is condemned to, that is, to take part, so to speak, in a game whose outcome is known in advance” (Lacan, Ethics 280). But there is a further sense in which what is known presupposes (and is presupposed by) what

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11 Similarly, the cognitive orientation of psychoanalysis is sometimes associated with a “psychocentrism” which distances itself from materiality and prevents Lacan from giving technology its due place (Hansen 171).
remains to be known or experienced, as is indicated in Lacan almost imperceptible shift in speaking of knowing the outcome as if it were continuous with “taking part” in the working out of this known outcome. To know more than the outcome of a game, one must first experience the mechanical working out of its causal programming. In the case of Antigone, however, we may ask further whether her knowing can be separated from the ethical significance of her condemnation and her “taking part” in the sense of knowingly participating in the actualization of her destiny. This is the point of contention between Žižek and Grigg: one locates ethics in the “aphanisis” or fading of the subject; the other looks for meaning in the conscious though psychically significant act of coming to terms with one’s destiny. But these positions may not be as incompatible as at first appears. If the act, for Žižek, must end in the “taking up” of “new beginnings,” then “aphanisis” is significant precisely in effecting a passage into possible actions in which the cognitive is necessarily expressed as the remainders of a greater cognitive drive. Antigone, as a character textually transmitted to us, knows not just how the game would work out in accordance with the rules. She knows, in a quite different sense, the fact of her being condemned and, furthermore, of the fact of her “taking part” as well. In this kind of deeper knowing, there is a more properly (purely) cognitive acceptance of something necessarily reduced in terms of the scale of knowledge, something coming from the “night of the world,” something “impossible,” something known but not clearly known.

By going “beyond” the symbolically protected world, Antigone reverses the “traumatic passage” and obtains (partially transmits to us) a glimpse of the real beyond of the everyday world. Such knowledge has to be transmitted as disembodied knowledge, but cannot but pertain to something in the body, inscribed not only in the flesh and blood of transmitted family Até but in the materiality of human intention and agency which has to be worked out in situated contexts but also demands to become intelligible through the cognitive passage to and from the beyond of the known. If this cognitive grounding of Antigone’s act is denied political effectivity, then we are not very far from the father but are unexpectedly returned to the original Oedipal situation: to know is to die, at least to die as a political being.

For Lacan, the gap between knowing and “taking part,” inevitably coinciding with the knowing of this “taking part,” is precisely the gap defined as “the relation of the subject to the Other” (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 206). In confirmation of Žižek’s position, political effectivity here has to be understood in
terms of the more general problematic of the fading of the subject. Here is Lacan’s explanation:

The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject. There, strictly speaking, is the temporal pulsation in which is established that which is the characteristic of the departure of the unconscious as such—the closing. (207)

Whenever a subject merely knows, or is known in advance, there is no “taking part,” or there is “taking part” only on condition that the subject first disappears, replaced by a petrified double called up by the signifier. The “closing” of the unconscious, however, implies that the fading is never complete, that the “closing” must already be “opening and closing” (Shepherdson, “Lacan” 121). In the “temporal pulsation” constituted by this movement, the subject of the unconscious reemerges in flashes, to disappear again with the “closing” that is bound to ensue. Cognitively speaking, such flashes may enable the conscious subject to make momentary approaches to a position from which the void behind this movement of disappearances becomes palpable between closings, reducing the distance, however briefly, between the field of the Other (where the conscious subject itself is located) and that of the subject of the unconscious. When this happens, it is not unreasonable to speak of the subject as “taking part” in something beyond the usual ordering of the symbolic.

It is not by accident that Lacan describes both Antigone’s act and the way psychoanalytic discourse approaches truth as a passage or a leap to the limit. Antigone does not only find herself at the place of a limit (Ethics 248), but by being at that place, “goes beyond the limits of the human”; she “goes toward Até” and “beyond the limit of Até” (263, 277). Similarly, when Lacan discusses the “concept of the concept,” what is invoked is a “leap” to the limit: “Indeed, if the concept is modeled on an approach to the reality that the concept has been created to apprehend, it is only by a leap, a passage to the limit, that it manages to realize itself” (Four Fundamental Concepts 19). For Antigone, going “toward” is already going “beyond,” since for a cognitive move, transgression is also realization: Antigone enacts “a moment of transgression or of realization” of her Até (Ethics
One finds oneself at a place of the limit, which thereby is transgressed as limit, but one realizes one’s transgression by having a point of view at that place to “approach” one’s life (280). Similarly, the concept “realizes itself” not by becoming reality but by taking up (conceptually) a position in reality as its own limit. This is explained by the paradoxical turn in the psychoanalytic conception of cause: “Cause is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain, in other words the law. . . . Whenever we speak of cause . . . there is always something anti-conceptual, something indefinite” (Four Fundamental Concepts 22). When one has a point of view, one does not have to follow chains of mechanical causality but can leap over the “indefinite” to realize an approximation of the true. In Antigone’s case, this is described as an anamorphic image of passion emerging out of “infinitesimal” images against a background of “decomposed and disgusting” forms (Ethics 272 f). In the case of the concept of the concept, “infinitesimal calculus” is invoked to indicate a leap from uncertainty to certainty.

From this point of view, the question of political effectivity, which is part of a more general question of causality and the “gap between nature and culture” (274), cannot be answered in any simple way. A cognitive move may seem to remain disembodied, lacking the mechanical effectivity of the physical world, unable to engage with “something anti-conceptual,” manifested here as “something indefinite.” On the other hand, one must recognize the principle that “there is cause only in something that doesn’t work” (Four Fundamental Concepts 22). Cause, on this account, is worthy of its name only when it implies a leap into the impossible, reaching beyond the indefinite, making what “doesn’t work” work. Such effectivity should not be ignored in any account of political agency.

Not One Less: The (Dis)Obedient Daughter

For psychoanalysis, the momentary positioning of the subject at the limit expresses the fundamental postulate that human experience cannot exceed the physical closure of the neurophysiological system of the body. In order to respond to exigencies of the causality of the world, the subject has to participate in symbolic systems, setting up a cognitive layer of being to provide reference points for its actions. The conception of a need for the Lacanian act implies that the blind working of the symbolic may not always serve the subject well, that there are times when it “doesn’t work” and mediation is required. In the more general context, however, the issue becomes one of proper limits: one has to develop ways to prevent the necessary mediation from becoming inflexible, insensitive or otherwise
detrimental to life. Since mediation takes place in the form of symbolic delegation, the maintenance of cognitive access naturally becomes the main concern. It is not that there is any lack of priority attributed to the materiality of the signifier and of the world, but as I have tried to show above, within the parameters of an ethics, the Lacanian act is fundamentally a cognitive act.

A similar approach can be found in Yogācāra thought. In this tradition of Buddhist philosophy, prominence is given to a “mind only” position predicated on the understanding that memory is constituted by the cumulative store of mental traces left behind by all instances of exposure to the use of symbolical constructions. Since such constructions are considered as the cause of suffering, Yogācāra proposes to “depart from the domination of memory, to be positioned within a ‘state of awareness’ [satori], allowing the ‘world of the real’ to appear, uncontaminated by common-sense knowledge and the like” (Izumi 98). In the context of Buddhist thought, of course, political effectivity is usually not a concern, but soteriological authority is. It becomes important to deal with “the tension between insight as pure cognition and as conceptually structured knowledge” (Ram-Prasad 160). It would be too hasty to compare this with the Lacanian act, but at least it is clear that in Yogācāra, too, the solution lies in maintaining a radical gap between the two spheres:

What remains pure—the attitude of desirelessness, based on knowledge of things as they are—is what is required for authoritative teaching, while what has to become impure for such teaching to be possible—the phenomenological undergoing of things as they are in experience—does not vitiate that necessary purity. (160)

Instead of the disturbance of the Void projected by the Lacanian act, Buddhism finds pure desirelessness at the threshold of the beyond. More interesting, however, is the fact that some structural points we have been looking at are repeated here: the closing of the purity that cannot be “vitiating,” the pulsation of the need to become impure, the underlying transmission of the remainder of the real signified by the subtle movement from “things as they are” to “things as they are in experience.” Without delving into the complexities of differentiating or comparing the two

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12 Admittedly Ram-Prasad’s commentary is predicated on the “synthetic Yogācāra-Madhyamaka” school, a late development which attempts to integrate Yogācāra thought into the older Madhyamaka tradition. The distinction, however, makes no difference here since we are concerned only with elements observed in Yogācāra thought as a whole.
different takes on a cognitive approach to reality, I will turn my attention to the
textualities of a film which will show how a consideration of the Yogācāra position
may point to a few more ways to add to our discussion of political agency and the
cognitive leap.

In Zhang Yimou’s film, Not One Less (1999), the “comedy” always consists in
producing something out of nothing, as if the whole story is about how the cause
becomes possible. The initial situation establishes this insistent optimism: we see a
thirteen-year-old girl is hired (that is, promised that she will be paid) as a substitute
teacher because Gao, the only teacher in the village has to leave to see his dying
mother. This situation “doesn’t work” because Minzhi, the thirteen-year-old
protagonist, does not know how to teach or how to manage her class. Necessity,
however, soon make things “work” to a degree, as it usually does in the kind of
extreme poverty represented in the story. Gao leaves after commanding Minzhi that
not anyone in the class should drop out during his absence. When one of the
students leaves to work as child laborer in the city, Minzhi decides that she must
honor Gao’s will (make it work) by looking for the missing student. Her “cause”
soon develops into a leap into the possible: to raise money for her trip to the city,
the class forces the manager of a brick factory to pay them, not because they moved
his bricks without being asked, but, as the manager emphatically pronounces, “out
of charitable intentions.” Eventually Minzhi manages to refind her missing student
after a testing of the limits of normal behavior by refusing (because she is without
any means) to follow routine procedures and sleeping outside the TV station,
eventually attracting the station director’s attention. This transgression, while it
lasts, reveals a certain breakdown in causality, forcing into open view the obscene
fact that the system “doesn’t work.” The director is apparently aware of the
proximity of the real and possible consequences, and helps out by broadcasting
Minzhi’s story in a talk show. Charity again shows its face. When Minzhi and the
boy return to the village, they bring with them abundant supplies donated by well-
intentioned city dwellers who have seen the show.

I’m proposing to read Not One Less not just because there is a certain
resemblance between Antigone, the “self-willed victim” (Lacan, Ethics 247) and
Minzhi, the girl who would stop at nothing. The fact that both Antigone and Minzhi
are inhabitants of the limit zone, one “dead in life,” the other born too early into the
teacher’s position, are only one of the ways the two can be linked together. Here I
would like to dwell on the different but complementary ways these two versions of
the womanly will are positioned in networks of causality. If Antigone’s will pertains
to the liminal zone of the drive, or to a “pure” desire waiting, in the patient
“narcissism of the Lost Cause” (Zupančič 238ff), for an eventual leap into drive, then Minzhi pertains to the unconscious, or its remainder in reality, weakly signifying the real but “not it” because of the lack of any ethical awareness. If Antigone inhabits the zone of the leap, then Minzhi takes up the leap at a distance, by virtualizing it, scaling it down, using it in the tactical maneuvers of everyday causality without cognitively becoming aware of the ethical consequences. Hers is the leap in reduced form, reduced in the sense of being cognitively incomplete.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, in terms of cognitive performativity, Minzhi seems nowhere close to the “limits of the human.” The “comic” ending, in fact, reveals considerable resonances between Minzhi and society as a whole: On the one hand, we have a teacher who is forced into her duties without adequate training; on the other hand, we see the larger social system failing to eliminate poverty or hide the limits of its effectivity, but working nevertheless, gratuitously, without deserving to do so. In both cases, there is “something anti-conceptual”: the individual engages in leaps of will, makes do with circumstantial necessity; the social system produces charitable acts, gets away with ideological interpellation. But these acts or conditions take place only in reduced form, since for both the individual and the community, the option of leaping to the limit seems very much in the air and far from truly transgressive. The fact that they are necessary, probable and possibly effective, is merely a sign that social control, if not the law of the father, is weak.

It is also obvious that we should not attach too much significance to the insistence of the film on reclaiming the “one less.” The absence of cognitive agency makes Minzhi mindless, but does not locate her at the limits of consciousness or position her for the leap of the Lacanian act: the “one less” does not constitute a Lacanian cause since the way it is reclaimed seems to violate the Lacanian principle that the cause of the unconscious must be a “lost cause,” to be “won” only by “sustaining” its status as lost, “at the level of the unconscious” (Lacan \textit{Four Fundamental Concepts} 128). This is not simply an issue of how to read or interpret the film, either. Indeed the film is a political event, a gesture at the national construction of modernity associated with Project Hope, a foundation created by the Chinese government to solicit contributions to help children from poor families attend school. During the making of \textit{Not One Less}, Zhang Yimou worked closely with this foundation (Xi, Johnson, Xu 331), and the film has been used as propaganda for its cause on innumerable fund-raising events.

\textsuperscript{13} Žižek, of course, would assert that “partial/incomplete” forms like this fail to do justice to the “ultimate horizon of the Lacanian Real” (Žižek and Daly 165).
On the other hand, as some critics have suggested, there seems to be a strange duality in which hiding and revealing go hand in hand. The more blatant the conformism is, the more reality seems to come to the surface. Thus, the film is both “an accomplice of the dominant ideology” and an indication of “the possibility of achieving a radically political subjectivity” (Xu 331 f); money in the film is both the dehumanizing “universal measure of value” and something that is “allowed to transgress its commercial meaning to embody humanistic values” (Cui 123). Such duality is presented in a narrative form of “pulsation”: a phase of revelation (failure of the system) followed by one of concealment (mending of the system by acts of good will). The concealment, however, cannot cancel the revelation, but can only supplement it, producing an exemplary turn of ironic reversal: the conformist affirmation of the benevolent post-Maoist state power becomes a real challenge to its paternalism, an implicit demand to the father who is not even sufficiently present to admit to its impotence, to remedy the disaster he left behind.14

In fact, what the whole story shows is that when the lost cause is won, something is always lost again: there can be “not one less” only when there are many more, the exceptional limit disappears in the sheer number of the everyday. Even the success of the film and its continued usefulness as propaganda does not prevent its literal cause from becoming lost to the complexity of changing times. A few years after the film was released, the school it used as a model in its pseudo-documentary setup had become even smaller, numbering one teacher (who had played Gao in the film himself) and six students (see Zhang et. al). Interestingly, dropouts were not the only reason for declining enrollment; many had left to go to better, more expensive places.

But the film seems to be aware of its own fate, which explains the need to maintain a sense of the imaginary. At the end of the story, the students rejoice in their free supply of fresh chalk, the lack of which has oppressed them so much before. Each child is asked to write down a Chinese character on the blackboard, signifying they, too, are no longer lost to the system, but are refound and added to the infinite number of “future masters” of the nation undergoing educational interpellation everywhere. They win a promised future (as Minzhi receives a promise of her wages in the film and eventually, in real life, a chance to study

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14 This is certainly a variation of the “strategy of overfulfilment” (Breger 86), a familiar Žižekian _topos_ of the transgressive potential of the masochist: “When a subject stages a masochistic scenario and says ‘I am a priori guilty, and therefore I want to be punished!’ it is the law that, in effect, reveals its impotence and frustration, since its universalistic foundations are exposed as merely functional to the superego command (‘Enjoy!’)” (Vighi and Feldner 119). The situation is also described by Gilles Deleuze (88).
abroad in 2006), but they lose the beauty and singularity they had when they were “beyond the limits” of determined citizenship. The touching story of how abandoned people formed their image of life out of the anamorphic fragments of an “inoperative” community is turned, as if by inexorable necessity, into a comedy of the state.

**Yogācāra and Anamorphic Reduction**

Clearly, then, Minzhi is not a failed version of Antigone. There is an opening and a closing, a momentary revelation of the limits of bearable privation and then an imaginary solution which neutralizes the revealed reality with a happy ending. This is at least a reduced form of pulsation. Xu Gang explains the real social conditions revealed by the film in Lacanian terms: they are the “invisible” stain, the objet a, of China’s socialist utopia, now “frozen” by the cinematic apparatus into visibility (Xu 335). My reading, however, questions the aptness of identifying the lost (and reclaimed) cause of *Not One Less* in this way with the Lacanian cause, because in the closure of the narrative, this “stain” has in fact been reclaimed by idealization, hidden again in the visibility of cognitive abstractness, in a sense betraying the Lacanian cause which, by definition, cannot be sustained in the terminal (“frozen”) state of being “won” (or lost). This freezing of the beyond is precisely what critics see as a grave danger in Žižek’s appeals to the absolute.

On the other hand, the very uncertainty of this reclaiming does reveal that there are, indeed, remainders of jouissance in the projected causality, intimations of a pulsating blindness. I will introduce two Yogācāra principles to explain such unfamiliar variations of the Lacanian passage to the impossible. To evoke Lacanian associations, I refer to them as the principle of the anamorphic turn and the principle of reflexive anamorphosis. Admittedly, these are only two ways to reduce and oversimplify a school of thought and cannot hope to do the least justice to the richness and diversity of such a long-standing tradition, but they must suffice here.

In Yogācāra, reality can only be the reality of cognition. This provides freer room for conceiving performative agency in reality. Thus, taking over the older Mādhyamika model of two truths, (*samvyri* or the conventional and *paramartha* or the absolute), early Yogācārins elaborated a view of reality as three “natures,” which came to be a staple element of all later variations: the *parikalpita* (the constructed), the *paratantra* (the interdependent), and the *parinispanna* (the
In crude terms, a distinction between the imaginary (with attendant symbolic constructions) and the real is elaborated into a trio of one imaginary and two reals, the interdependent being descriptive of causal reality (the mind as a causal machine), and the fulfilled being a reference to the beyond of such reality. It is notable here that the way one approaches this beyond is not so much through a leap, a passage through an “arcade in the wall,” as through an about-turn from a point of view (based within the interdependent) directed to the constructed to one directed to the fulfilled.¹⁶

Thus the three natures can actually be grouped into two: the constructed-dependent (understanding the dependent as if it is constructed), and the dependent-fulfilled (understanding the dependent from the standpoint of the realized), with the interdependent serving as a pivotal term connecting and determining the other two natures.¹⁷ One takes a deluded view of the interdependent and one sees the constructed; one turns around to take an awakened view of the interdependent and one sees the fulfilled. The fulfilled, therefore, does not fulfill anything but simply allows the constructed nature of objective psychic reality to emerge; in the words of Vasubandhu’s Trimśikā-kārikā, the fulfilled is “neither exactly different nor non-different from the interdependent” (Anacker 188). Furthermore, the Tri-Svabhāva-Nideśa gives a full elaboration of how each of the three natures is in principle non-different from any other, differing only in how each arises, is “entered,” or is dealt with in the subjective turn from ignorance to true knowledge (Anacker 291-96). The three natures are like anamorphic variations of the same reality (compared, for example, to the semblance of an elephant created by the magician, the way this elephant is made to appear, and the non-being of this elephant): they are “only one world . . . known/experienced in three ways” (Kaplan 69). Such circumstances (traditionally described as an “idealism”) allow the ethical to coincide with the

¹⁵ “Nature” (suabhāva) refers to the presence of consistent self-substance. For the continuity between the Madhyamaka and the Yogācāra, see Kudō 217-21. For English translations of some basic texts see Anacker. I follow Anacker in the translation of most Yogācāra terms.

¹⁶ Nagao, however, does refer to this about-turn as a “leap” from the constructed to the fulfilled, a “jump from the imagined world to the consummated world,” across an “abyssal gap” (65, 66).

¹⁷ This is the standard reading in modern scholarship; see, e.g., Okano 199, Ōta 303. The standard reference for linking the fulfilled to the interdependent is Verse 21 of Vasubandhu’s Trimśikā-kārikā: “The interdependent own-being [nature], on the other hand, is the discrimination which arises from conditions, and the fulfilled is its state of being separated always from the former,” i.e., the state in which the interdependent is always separated from the constructed (Anacker 188).
cognitive, much more so than in Lacanian theory. Since causality is conceived as entirely mental, there seems to be no real need for a lion’s leap; a simple turn of one’s cognitive position by itself allows one to act ethically and capture or reconfigure the anamorphosis.

A consideration of such cultural circumstances provides one way to explain the difference between Minzhi and Antigone. In a world of weakened paternal authority (in part because of the newly adopted, highly time-compressed form of Chinese capitalism), the ethical leap can be seen to be dissolved into less forceful (less tragic and less heroic) but more pervasive cognitive gestures, operating in terms more like the Yogācāra turn than the Lacanian leap. When Minzhi insists on finding the boy, for example, she is taking up “things as they are” in her experience. Since her experience is actually a lack of experience, however, a cognitive turn is enacted, resulting in the breakdown of the existing anamorphic construction. Such cognitive gestures can be half-hearted, even mindless, since they may represent various stages in the progress of anamorphic transformations from ignorance toward the fully aware. What eventually matters is whether a direction may emerge, more or less in the way of an automaton, from the convergent patterns of cumulative cognitive changes.

Yogācāra does provide accounts of the breaks which may eventually occur out of such performative growth: they lead to a “conversion of base” (āśraya-paravṛtti) which denotes “the destruction of the storehouse consciousness” (Hase 187). In the Trīṃṣikā-kārikā, this “revolution at the basis” is described as “super-mundane knowledge,” a state in which “all constructions are shed, all mental borders are shattered, all past ‘habit-energies’ redirected” (Anacker 189, 190 n14). It is noteworthy that even such “destruction” occurs only as a cognitive act undergone by the individual (technically speaking within the practice of yoga meditation historically initiated by Gautama Buddha himself). This is a form of radical individualism without the mediation of symbolic organization or social hierarchy. Here mediation takes place not in symbolic ordering but in the very interdependent networks of psychic causality which, as the cognitive “base” supplementing (“quilting”) the constructed and the fulfilled respectively to form a crosslinking common ground of memory and subjectivity, may converge across individuals in the automatic working out of objective determinations, without room for much personal intervention.

When all is said, however, Minzhi does transgress certain social limits and cannot be said to be simply like everyone else. Here we need a second principle which would lead us back to something more like a Lacanian leap. In Trīṃṣikā-
kārikā, the section of verses dealing with the three natures is immediately followed by a section on the three absences of nature describing the three natures as eventually without self-substance (Verses 23-25). This is a principle of reflexive anamorphosis. The “fulfilled,” as explained above, is a state arrived at within interdependent cognition and, furthermore, is dependent on the interdependent in its very definition as a way to take up interdependent causality. Such dependence implies that it is itself always in danger of becoming an anamorphic cognitive construction. Thus the “fulfilled” has to be subjected to further anamorphic deconstruction to reveal that there is no substance underneath. This is an implicit recognition of objective reality beyond cognition, even though this reality cannot be accessed directly and so is of no use for knowledge. This returns us to the ineffable state of enlightenment: the mind stands at the limits of communication, having gone through layers of anamorphosis to see the nothing beyond. Without such “destruction,” one cannot envision any possibility of arriving at a “revolution at the basis.”

Minzhi, of course, is far from having reached such an awakened state, but if the Yogācāra model has any explanatory efficacy, its account of the absolute real cannot be simply subsumed by the non-communicable without remainder. The return from the beyond in the Lacanian leap is not a mere discursive gesture, but has to be borne out in every case of an ethical act if only in reduced form. A perceived danger of Žižek’s “absolutism” is his embracing of totality and the universal. For example, he criticizes new social movements as “single-issue movements’ which lack the dimension of universality—that is to say, they do not relate to the social totality” (“Afterword” 297). One way to defend this move is to say that, in contrast to local “sites of resistance” playing into schemes of opposition management enforced by established powers, the failure and missed opportunity of Lenin’s act at least preserves “the flicker of the utopian light” in the spirit of a Benjaminian weak messianism (Vighi and Feldner 127). Thus even outbursts of racial violence may be considered “proof, a contrario, of the possibility of the authentic proletarian revolution,” of a sort of unconscious awareness of the presence of “emancipatory chances” (Žižek, “Afterword” 256). For such totalizing conceptions of the ethical to be viable, what is needed is precisely a kind of formal weakening or reduction, instanced by Walter Benjamin’s messianism, which, being firmly rooted in the de-absolutized world, would prevent the collective objet a from becoming “frozen” as revealed truth.

Similarly, the anamorphic cognitive acts of Yogācāra do not simply and conveniently end in the cessation of all constructions (nirvana as suicide). There
must be consequences for, and therefore already dependence on, the practical world. In Minzhi’s case, the unusual situation and the unusual performative acts do point to an opening of the constructed social and political reality, forcing into view not only possible variations in the anamorphic configuration of the world but the place of the leap from which one cannot return without partaking of the revolutionary possibilities inhering in a view of the void. The opening is immediately followed by a closing, as if the constructed view is responding by imaginary acts of charity automatically induced to restore the normal picture of the world. But we have to assume that the brief “pulsation” of the real will have some effects in the communication of converging social desire, a taste of communicable “revolution at the basis.” The fact of its weakening or reduction into make-believe is positive in terms of a kind of political effectivity which is diffused and psychically determined, and therefore not easily managed in the usual schemes of political agency. Minzhi is different from Antigone in the mindless acting out of cognitive possibilities, in the delegation of agency to the interdependence of objective reality, to “thoughts without a thinker” (Epstein 404 f). The principle of the underlying leap to the limit, however, is the same.

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