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In Western capitalist society everything in people's lives appears to be a matter of choice. One can choose one's identity, sexual orientation, religion, to have or not have children, one is free to remodel one's body, even change gender and one also hopes to have some power over the ultimate incurable in one's life – when and how to die. Foucault's vision from his last works on the history of sexuality was to make a work of art out of ourselves. Today, it appears that this proposition has been fully embraced by the dominant ideology.

From the advertising boards around us we are constantly reminded that we can make our own life into whatever we wish for. A famous maker of women's underwear is advertising the new collection with the question: „What woman do you want to be today“; a travel company is urging customers with the slogan: „Life – book now!“; a university is addressing future students with the prompt: „Become what you want to be!“ and a fashion designer is appeasing the consumers' feelings of guilt with the exclamation: „I am worth it!“ Even little children are seduced with these kinds of messages. „I am something special“ is the title of one of a new type of children's books and it clearly shows that in times of commodity fetishism with its increasing danger to fall into the phantasmagoria of sameness, the child is constantly encouraged to develop his or her uniqueness.<sup>2</sup> The media thus tell us to become architects of the most important project – our own life, designers of the most valuable asset – our own body, and managers of the most important enterprise – our creative faculties.

It is interesting to juxtapose this idea of being an artist of one's own life and having limitless choices in designing one's existence with the fact that many artists are unable not to do what they are doing. Quite often it happens that when an artist is asked why he or she is expressing him- or herself in a particular way, the answer is: „I just had to do it“. Such a creative urge that is apparently pushing the artist into a particular direction seems to be beyond any rational choice.

The American artist, Stephen Shannabrook, for example, seems to be such a person. In his work he very much circulates around issues of death, medicine and even adds chocolates to the mix. Shannabrook became well known for making special kinds of chocolate pralines by molding chocolate on the wounds on dead bodies he had found in Russian and American morgues. When I asked Shannabrook, why this combination of chocolates and dead bodies, he quickly offered a theory of what happened in his childhood. His father was a doctor and as a young boy, Shanabrook has been fascinated by envisioning him performing surgery and autopsies. But an equally memorable experience from his childhood is related to chocolates. As a young child, Shannabrook has been passing the chocolate factory on his way to school day after day and became mesmerized by the smell around this factory. In his teenage years, Shannabrook started spending all his afternoons helping out in the factory so that he was able to enjoy this smell.

In explaining his art work, Shannabrook likes to point out that chocolate melts at exactly the same temperature as the body temperature is. By molding chocolates on the wounds on corpses, Shannabrook tries to supplement the horror image of the wounds with the seductive smell of the chocolates. And from the responses he gets from the public, it seems that the more people look at the pralines, the more they forget about them being molded on corpses and give in to the enjoyment of the smell.

One can make lots of quick psychoanalytic conclusions why Stephen Shannabrook's work appears as something beyond any rational choice. It seems that in his work he cannot stop reflecting on medicine, death and chocolates. One can guess that the smell of chocolates is in a particular way linked to partial drives – to the pockets of enjoyment for the subject. However, one can also speculate whether Shannabrook had a traumatic relationship with his father. Does he understand his father as a castration figure who prevents his son's access to enjoyment (i. e. takes life out of the body)? Does Shannabrook have an overwhelming anxiety over death and tries to deal with it by covering the horror of death with the seductiveness of the smell of chocolates? Or is he actually enormously fascinated by death and is just coupling this fascination with the enjoyment that he gets out of the smell of chocolates? No matter which direction we would take here, we will have a problem fully explaining why artists like Shanabrook seem to circulate on and on around a particular issue and create fascinating art out of it. While Shannabrook's art appears to be determined by the circumstances in which he lived, one should nonetheless take his response to them as a particular type of choice: his art presents a very individual approach of the circumstances he lived in as well as inner dilemmas that he is dealing with.

When contemporary ideology insists that people can approach their own life as an art project, it glorifies instead the idea of *rational* choice that for some time has been dominating primarily the domain of economic theory. Late capitalism, with its insistence on choice, of course, only continues the old idea of the „self made“ man which capitalism has promoted from its early days on. However, one can easily observe that this talk about endless possibilities we can play out in our lives is concurrent with the talk on an increase of anxiety in today's society. And it seems that this overwhelming insistence that the subject has a choice to make his or her life into what he or she wishes has contributed to this increase. Why does choosing direction of our life increase anxiety? Why is choice perceived as so troubling? And how do we deal with the fact that there is still no cure for death and aging in times of limitless choice?

**Psychoanalysis and choice** Albert Camus expressed quite a dramatic view on choice when he posed the question: „Shall I kill myself or have a cup of coffee?“ This rather absurd dilemma depicts nicely how for the human being his or her very existence is always a matter of choice. It is not the case that subjects are simply overwhelmed by making choices about what kind of life to live – to continue living is the most important choice for the subject to make. The nature of this existential choice has already been part of Kierkegaard's analysis of anxiety when he perceived freedom as being essentially linked to anxiety. His idea was that the subject is anxious because of „the possibility of possibility“ freedom entails, which is why the subject primarily has anxiety before him- or herself.<sup>3</sup> Sartre<sup>4</sup> continued this line of thought by pointing out that the person who stands in front of abyss is not anxious over the fact that he or she might fall down, but that he or she has the possibility of throwing him- or herself into the abyss.

Freud also made an important point about choice when he talked about the choice of neurosis. He first mentioned the term *Neurosenwahl* in a letter to Fliess<sup>5</sup>, but actually developed it later in the paper on sexual etiology of the neuroses. Although at first Freud thought that the decision as to which neuroses the subject develops is dependent on specific characteristics of some sexual events in early childhood, he later changed his mind and pointed out that traumatic childhood experiences do not necessarily incite neuroses. The latter are much more dependent on the nature of repression and defenses of the ego. Equally, „it is not a question of what sexual experiences a particular individual had had in his childhood, but rather of his reaction to these experiences – of whether he had reacted to them by ‚repression‘ or not.“<sup>6</sup> Freud perceives the subject's defenses as reactions that he or she forms to the sexuality that the subject encounters. We need to perceive this re-

action as a form of choice, which also means that the subject is responsible for his or her neurosis.<sup>7</sup>

Jacques Lacan also perceived subjectivization as linked to choice. However, choice has not been perceived as some kind of self-making, i. e. rationally deciding who one is or creating oneself into a work of art as contemporary ideology seems to suggest. Subjectivization for Lacan is always linked to the field of the Other – the symbolic structure in which the subject lives. The subject can only be known in the place of the Other, which means that one cannot define subject as self-consciousness. Lacan explains the logic of choice that pertains to subjectivization by imagining a story of three prisoners who are condemned to death, but can escape this destiny, if they are able to solve a particular puzzle. The prison warden informs the prisoners that each of them has either a black or white disk on their back. All together there are three white and two black disks. Out of this selection, the prison warden has chosen three – one disk for each prisoner. While the prisoners cannot see the color of their own disk, they can see the disks of the others. The task of the prisoners is to figure out the color of their own disk without talking to others. The prisoner who will solve this puzzle first will be set free. If one prisoner has a white disk and the others two black ones, the one with the white disk has an easy task, since he will immediately see the two black disks and thus quickly come to the conclusion that he must have a white disk. In this case, his eyes will be enough to win the game. Things become more complicated, if the prisoners have one black and two white disks. Here, we can imagine more hesitation where the prisoners will try to figure out what the others do see. The prisoner who, for example, sees one black and one white disk will reason: „If I have a black disk, the prisoner with the white disk would have seen two black disks and thus would have been able to leave the room; since this does not happen, I must have a white disk.“ An even more complicated detour in thought is needed, if all three prisoners have white disks. Here, all of them reason in the following way: „I see two white disks, if I have a black disk the other two prisoners must guess whether they are black or white – like it was the case in the previous situation when we had two white and one black disk. Since neither of the two other prisoners is making a move, I must be white myself and thus better stand up and leave.“ In this case, the prisoners' choice relies on hesitation on the side of the others. Every prisoner hesitates, but only by also seeing hesitation on the side of the other prisoners, he is then able to make a gesture and stand up.

We can read this puzzle, which Lacan uses to describe the moment of subjectivization, as an explanation of how the subject „chooses“ him- or herself. The subject is always dealing with the radical uncertainty as to who he or she is. And taking on a certain sym-

bolic identity (i. e. making a proclamation: „This is me!“), involves a detour via the Other. First, we have the symbolic setting, the language in which the subject is placed and with the help of signifiers the subject will make that gesture of acquiring symbolic identity. Second, we have the desire of the Other. Lacan's image of the disk symbolizes the object small *a* in the subject. The latter is always guessing what kind of an object he or she is in the desire of the Other. And it is through observing others and speculating what they see in us that we try to figure out who we are for them and for ourselves.

The very fact that the subject becomes a speaking being involves a choice. The subject needs to go through the process of alienation, which involves a very particular kind of loss. Lacan imagines that by presenting an intersection of two circles (the field of the subject and the field of the Other). On the side of the subject we have being and on the side of the Other we have meaning, i. e. language, institutions, culture etc. – all that defines this field into which the subject is born. In the intersection between the subject and the Other there is a place where both fields meet, however this place is actually a place of non-meaning. Lacan points out that: „The veil of alienation is defined by a choice whose properties depend on this, that there is, in the joining, one element that, whatever the choice operating may be, has as its consequence a neither one, nor the other. The choice, then, is a matter of knowing whether one wishes to preserve one of the parts, the other disappearing in any case.“<sup>8</sup> Lacan illustrates this choice with the dilemma when robbers demand „Your money or your life?“ If one chooses money, one loses both, since one will be killed, but if one gives money, one also loses – i. e. one will have life deprived of money.

In regard to defining who the subject is for him- or herself, Lacan stressed „future anterior“ in contrast to „past tense“. That means that: „I will be what I am now through my choice“, instead of „I am what I already was“. Similarly to Freud, Lacan opposes that the subject is determined by his or her past. There is always a moment of choice on the side of the subject in how he or she reacts to the past, even though this „choice“ is perceived as forced choice, i. e. it is linked to subject's defenses. The traumatic nature of this choice is that it entails a loss and opens a void. The advent of the symbolic presented by the forced choice brings forth something that did not „exist“ before, but which is nonetheless anterior to it, a past that has never been present.<sup>9</sup> Through the act of forced choice we lose something that we never had, but we lost it anyhow.

Another important choice for the subject in the process of subjectivization involves the dilemma between „le pere ou pire“ – the father or worse. Here too, we have no choice at the end. To refuse the father in an attempt to maintain the relation with the maternal

Thing means loss of enjoyment of that (incestuous) relation since immersion in that impossible relation can only mean the annihilation of the subject. This is a choice between the law of the Father, castration, and the unlimited, menacing jouissance of the mother, psychosis.

The most important point about all these cases of so called „forced choice“ is, that here we are not simply dealing with an absence of choice. Rather, the choice is offered and denied in the same gesture. However, the very fact that we have the gesture of choice although it is a forced one accounts for the fact that the subject is not determined by external or internal forces, which also accounts for the fact that subjectivity always involves certain freedom, even if this freedom is only to form one's own defenses. Any type of artistic, creative freedom also follows this logic of forced choice – the artist always „chooses“ his or her own way of sublimating external and internal deadlocks that he or she is dealing with.

**Troubles with capitalism** Why is choice suddenly such a problem in today's society? A number of psychoanalysts and philosophers have for some time been debating whether late capitalism is turning into a society without limits where there is also the lack of social prohibition and where it seems that the Symbolic law in the meaning of the name of the father does not function anymore. Although disappearance of traditional social prohibitions appears to be liberating, it nonetheless looks like instead of traditional authorities people are constantly searching for new ones. In the choice between „pere ou pire“ people are however often choosing the latter – „bad“ versions of the father, like various gurus, religious leaders, self-help therapists, media icons etc.

In the early seventies, Lacan made an observation that in a developed capitalistic system, the subject's relationship to the social field can be observed to form a particular discourse. In this „Discourse of Capitalism,“<sup>10</sup> the subject relates to the social field in such a way that he or she takes him- or herself as a master. The subject is not only perceived to be totally in charge of him- or herself, the subject also appears to have power to recuperate the loss of jouissance. In capitalism, the subject is thus perceived as an agent who has enormous power.

What does it mean that the subject is placed in the position of such an agent? First, it looks as if this subject is free from subjection to history and genealogy and thus free from all signifying inscriptions. This seems to be the subject who is free to choose not only objects that supposedly bring him or her satisfaction, but even more the direction of his or her life, i. e., the subject chooses him- or herself. Therefore, this subject appears as

being totally independent of the Big Other and especially free from traditional authorities, like family, state, etc.

Lacan points out that one finds rejection or better foreclosure of castration in the „Discourse of Capitalism“. This foreclosure happens when society functions more and more without limits and where there seems to be a constant push towards some kind of limitless jouissance. This push to jouissance at all costs is especially visible in all kind of forms of toxic mania – from excessive consumption of alcohol, drugs, shopping, workaholicism, etc.<sup>11</sup> Capitalism more and more transforms the proletarian slave into a free consumer. However, limitless consumption paradoxically provokes the moment when the subject starts „consuming himself.“ As a result of this we have an increase in self-harm as well as an endless search for excessive enjoyment.

And although the subject in the Discourse of Capitalism is perceived as being totally in charge of him- or herself and especially free to make numerous choices, one sees a paradoxical trend that this possibility of choice opens doors to an increase of anxiety. When we speak about this particular anxiety, we need to point out that it has to do with the fact that every choice involves a loss. Strong identification with the master becomes one of the ways to deal with this anxiety allowing the subject to relinquish his or her doubt, to avoid choice and responsibility, and thus in some way to find a relief for his or her own existence.

**„As if“** In today's society we do have changes in subjects' self-perception, as well as in their perception of the Big Other. Some more pessimistic psychoanalysts however are concluding that as a result of the lack of traditional authorities and changes in the functioning of the symbolic law, one finds an increase in psychosis. Nowadays, some psychoanalysts are looking closely at the cases of so-called non-triggered psychosis where there is no delirium to show that a person has a psychotic structure. As a consequence some are reviving Helen Deutsch's idea of so-called „as if“ personalities: people who might not actually develop a full-blown psychosis like Schreber, but nonetheless have a psychotic structure. Some analysts call these cases „ordinary psychosis“ or „white psychosis.“ What distinguishes these individuals from neurotics, is that they often express enormous certainty with regard to their perception of reality. They are people without doubts.

One French psychoanalyst describes the case of a male patient with a number of successful careers in his life. As a young man, he had befriended a lawyer in a prominent firm and became a successful lawyer himself. He then met a sailor on the street and fol-

lowed him into the merchant navy. Later, he encountered a businessman and subsequently turned himself into a successful businessman. Unlike Schreber, this was not a delusory form of psychosis triggered by a particular event. Rather it was a series of successful identifications where the patient not only mimicked other individuals, but also used these powerful identifications with people he randomly encountered to transform his whole life without experiencing any apparent anxiety or doubt about the path he had chosen. When the psychoanalyst asked the patient why given his success he felt it necessary to enter analysis, he replied simply „My wife told me to do so.“ Not surprisingly, he became a very successful patient!

In 1956, Lacan took the „as-if“ (which is nowadays often referred to as borderline structure) as „mechanism of imaginary compensations“ to which subjects have resorted who „never enter into the play of signifiers, except by a sort of exterior imitation.“ This form of imitation can easily be understood as another version of simulacra and sameness that Benjamin was talking about. When the subject is caught in this imaginary dimension, he or she has lots of problems with his or her identity (interweaving of identity, illusions of doubles, etc.). One of the features of psychotics is that they are obsessed with mimicry, shaping themselves according to one set of ideas and then just as quickly abandoning them, and especially by strongly identifying with other people.

Doesn't the ideology of the late capitalist self encourage us to live „as if“ we were without limits, in fact free? Is the modern self out of touch with reality, delusional in some sense? Can we argue that late capitalism is producing more psychosis, as some psychoanalysts want to suggest?

This would be a duly simplistic and pessimistic conclusion. There is certainly some evidence for increasing plasticity in forms of identification. Players on the internet rarely appear as themselves, preferring in many cases to change not only their gender and sexual orientation, but also their race, religion, and age. There is nothing new about fantasizing about being someone else, but modern trends suggest something more profound. In the age group 18–25 in the U. K., more young people not only report having had a sexual experience with both a person of the same sex and of the opposite sex, but they are unwilling to classify or categorize their sexuality on the basis of sexual practice. The distinction gay/straight appears to have little purchase for these young people in terms of how they categorize themselves and others. As one commentator remarked „Homosexuality is over!“<sup>12</sup>

However, refusing categorizations and playing with your sexual identity is not the same thing in any sense as Schreber's delusion that he had been turned into a woman. Schreber had no doubt about his bodily transformation. It is also not the same thing as the

mimicry in the case of „the successful patient“ described earlier whose transformations caused him no anxiety or uncertainty. Whereas those of us who are ceaselessly remaking ourselves in the contemporary moment have many doubts, and can often feel overwhelmed by the fear of failure. In addition, people are still deeply concerned with the question of who they are for others. Our play with identifications is quite different from the mimicry of the psychotic. His or her certitude is replaced in the contemporary moment with something that looks more like the celebration of undecidability.

Yet, this undecidability is itself caught up in capitalist circuits as evidenced by the rise – and subsequent marketing – of the metrosexual who is more a set of consumer identifications rather than being a sexual identity. Under late capitalism, shifts in identity and indeed in identifications are celebrated as the new vogue and turned into profit.

There seems to be an increase in possibilities of making oneself into what we want to be as can be seen in media bombardments with self-help books. We certainly live in a world that is self-centered and encourages us to „love ourselves.“ A simple search on amazon.com tells us that there are 138,987 books which try to help you love yourself – including one with the title the *Learning to Love Yourself Workbook*, which shows that labor is as important a part of capitalism as ever.

How does this affect the subject? In his seminar on anxiety Lacan points out that: „The specular field is the field in which the subject is the most secure in terms of anxiety.“<sup>13</sup> We can take the specular field as the dimension of the imaginary. All these media slogans that encourage us to become ourselves are, for example, part of this field. On top of very strong bombardment from the imaginary field, today's subject lives in society in which the real, the nonsymbolizable, appears as something that can be scientifically explained, i. e. as something that can be covered by signifiers. Referring to Lacan's seminar on *Anxiety*, Jacques Alain Miller points out: „This point of view which comes from a sort of positivism assumes that the real is reduced to this knowledge and thus evaporates in this knowledge. It is a positivism for which anxiety is an illness which inhibits access to the real, while it is the inverse of what is proposed here, that anxiety is on the contrary the route access to the real“.<sup>14</sup>

We are dealing here with two different ways of how anxiety is appeased: first, on the level of the imaginary and second, on the level of the symbolic. If on the first level, the real is covered by images on the second level the real appears as something that can be fully symbolized – uttered in words and scientifically explained. (Most of the self-help books on anxiety are, for example, full of advices, worksheets etc. on how to appease anxiety with the help of signifiers.)

These two trends dominate today's world. When we are saying that the subject is today perceived as a self creator, we are depicting the scenario in which the subject is addressed as someone who can form his or her own mirror image. Of course, in the formation of the imaginary, the symbolic always plays the primal role. At the time when the child, for example, goes through the mirror stage, the symbolic, the language is already operative. When a little child observes his or her image in the mirror, the primary caregiver utters: „Look at your self. This image in the mirror is you.“ With today's idea that the subject is a self-creator one can observe a slight difference in this call to the child. Observing the new types of children's books which encourage self-creation, one gets the impression that saying to the child: „This is you“ is somehow replaced with the idea that the child should have the possibility of choice of how he or she sees oneself. The title of the children's book, „I am Special, I am Me!“,<sup>15</sup> mentioned before nicely encapsulates this trend. It tells the story of a little boy, Milo, who wants to become a pirate captain, but other kids say that he is too short. After that he wants to be a lion, but is told that he is too small and he cannot be a prince because he is supposedly not handsome enough. Finally, the mother convinces Milo that he is something special and can be whoever he wants to be. Such kinds of books try to appease anxiety in various ways, however, they necessarily fail this endeavor, since anxiety is an affect which touches the real and is therefore as such not signifiable.

**New Forms of Intimacy** Some psychoanalysts are concluding that „Discourse of Capitalism“ does not leave space for love, especially not space for sublime courtly love. What we have instead is an increase of narcissistic illusions and a push towards sexuality that hopefully brings some lost jouissance. Today's subjects seem to have problems determining how to situate themselves in regard to sexual difference. Since sexual identification is linked to the way the subject places him- or herself after going through the process of castration, there seems to be more of a turn towards androgyny and bisexuality with the changes in the level of the castration complex. However, the main problem is that in Discourse of Capitalism, sexuality is being perceived in a narcissistic way as an endless matter of seduction and fluctuation from one object to another.

If one cannot easily agree with pessimistic conclusions that psychosis seems to be overwhelmingly present in late capitalism, one nonetheless needs to admit that something has changed in the subject's relationship towards him- or herself as well as society at large, that there is a change in the nature of limits as well as a push towards excessive jouissance.

Let us look at how the lack of limits affects personal relationships today. In a society determined by the idea of choice matters of love and sexuality seem extremely liberating at first. What is better than envisioning a possibility to be free from social prohibitions when it comes to our sexual enjoyment; how wonderful it appears to finally stop bothering about what parents and society at large fashion as normal sexual relations; and how liberating it seems to change our sexual orientation or even physical appearance of sexual difference. It is more than obvious that such „freedom“ does not bring satisfaction; on the contrary, it actually limits it.

In analyzing human's desires, psychoanalysis has from the beginning linked desire with prohibition. For the subject to develop desire something has to be off limits. When the subject struggles with ever evolving dissatisfaction in regard to non-attainability of his or her object of desire, the solution is not to get rid of the limit in order to finally fuse with the object of desire, but to be able to somehow „cherish“ the very limit and perceive the object of desire as worthy of our striving precisely because it is inaccessible.

Looking at today's media talk about sexuality, it is not difficult to observe that there are very few things that are prohibited (with the exception of child molestation, incest, and sexual abuse), while there is an overwhelming „push to enjoy.“ Sexual transgression is marketed as the ultimate form of enjoyment. The idea seems to be that if one works on it, learns its tricks and then practices it relentlessly, there are no limits to the satisfaction a person can achieve. *Cosmopolitan* magazine thus encourages those who have not yet mastered new techniques of reaching ultimate joys to enroll in sex school. Simultaneously with this marketing of enjoyment, one reads about the very impossibility to enjoy in popular media. John Gray, the famous author of „Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus“, now writes about „Why my Grandmother seems to have more sex than I do?“<sup>16</sup> His answer, of course, again turns into another form of advice: be more relaxed, follow these or those steps of arousing desire, etc.

When we look at how we deal with sexuality in this supposedly limitless society, it is easy to observe that limits did not actually disappear or that prohibitions still exist – however, the locus where they came from has changed. If, in the past, prohibitions have been transmitted with the help of social rituals (like initiation rituals in pre-modern society, and functioning of the „Name-of-the-Father“ in the traditional patriarchal society), today the subject sets his or her own limits. The contemporary subject is thus not only self-creator, but also his or her own „prohibitor.“

**No choice to die** Although people today seem to be free to choose the direction of their life, they appear powerless towards what Baudelaire called the figures of time. Aging,<sup>17</sup> dying and inscribing oneself into the succession of the generations, became more and more difficult in this time of freedom of choice. While ideology promotes the illusion of the eternal present, aging and death remain the incurable. Today's media present aging as something unacceptable, traumatic and a matter of choice – it is up to every individual to „do“ something against it, or better work on not showing the signs of aging, as well as to follow many proposed suggestions on how to prevent death. The idea that in times of freedom of choice we can imagine even death being a matter that can easily be controlled and hopefully postponed is very much behind today's obsession with showing how death and dying actually look like – something which one can observe in today's arts.

In times when we so often hear that we live in an age of catastrophes, it does not seem surprising that we have experienced the emergence of so called catastrophe arts. In the last years, Mexican photographer Enrique Metinides became an especially well known representative of this field. In the last 40 years, Metinides has been compulsively collecting images of various catastrophes, from car accidents, train crashes, suicide, fires etc. Similarly like in the case of Stephen Shanabrook, we have an artist who does not seem to be able to stop circulating around a particular theme. In Metinides' case we also have the narration of a particular childhood event that precipitated this passion to reflect on violence.

When Enrique Metinides was twelve years old, his father bought him his first camera with which he was able to record numerous accidents that happened at the crossroad near his father's shop. As early as a teenager, Metinides thus became obsessed with recording various catastrophes. He soon became employed by a major newspaper as the youngest photographer whose job was solely devoted to recording human suffering. This passion for recording catastrophes continued throughout Metinides' life and resulted in thousands of photographs which were recently exhibited in art galleries. After his retirement, Metinides stopped using cameras; however, he decided to start recording catastrophes on the VCR from the seven TV screens that he installed in his apartment.

The whole of Metinides's life has thus been about recording and cataloguing accidents. It looks as if Metinides has taken the uncontrollable (the catastrophes and accidents) as something that can be put in order by being catalogued. Metinides' organizing zeal went even so far that he created special codes for the policemen and ambulance to know what kind of injury happened at the place of the accidents. At the same time, Me-

tinides also started collecting toy versions of various rescue vehicles, from ambulance cars to fire-engines and police cars.

In regard to Metinides' fascination with catastrophes one can only make the provisional theory as of why he devoted his whole life to this passion. Nestor Garcia Canclini, in his analysis of Metinides' work, takes Metinides' collection mania and his gaze of an all embracing God as two attempts to „guard, foresee and avert risk“. <sup>18</sup> However, one can also say that Metinides tries to avert the highest risk we all need to deal with – death.

The information we get about the way Metinides structures his work give a lot of indication that there is a problem with death that psychoanalysis often observes with obsessional neurotics. The characteristic of the latter is that they very much want to be in control of everything in their life and they especially want to control death. Often an obsessional plans all his activities in detail; everything is well programmed and organized, all to prevent something unexpected to happen. An obsessional in particular tries to master his desire and the desire of the Other. He never gives up thinking, planning and talking. What the obsessional dreads is to vanish as a subject – i. e. to loose grounds and for example loose himself in a passionate encounter with the object of his desire. In order to prevent this to happen, an obsessional will thus find all kinds of excuses, duties, tasks etc. That is why for the obsessionals it is said that they are never at the place they seem to be. When the obsessional is, for example, in bed with the desired woman, he will in his head actually be somewhere else – at the time of the intercourse, he thus might fantasize to have sex with another woman, just to keep control of the situation he is in and not to allow himself to come too close to an enjoyment he finds to overwhelming. Similarly as the obsessional tries to prevent an encounter with desire and enjoyment, he tries to outsmart death.

In the way Metinides' photographs capture death one can observe an attempt to record death in order to be able to control it and make it non-threatening. Thus, his photographs, for example, are either entirely focused on the eyes of the observer and sort of neglect the very accident, or they try to capture the opened eyes of the dead person who thus appears as non-dead. In a strange way, corpses in Metinides' work look as if they are still alive. And maybe Metinides pictures death as not being death precisely in order to overcome his own horror of dying.

Jacques Lacan has characterized an obsessional as someone who constantly questions: „Am I dead or alive?“ Since an obsessional is horrified not only by his own desire, but especially by the desire of the Other, he first of all tries to get rid of this desiring Other. He does it in such a way that he takes the place of the Other, for example an authority, and he himself imposes orders and prohibitions that might have come from the

Other. So, in order to prevent something unexpected coming from the Other, the obsessional becomes an Other himself. The obsessional hopes that with the death of the desiring Other, he will finally be free to live. However, through the ritual of continuously imposing new rules and prohibitions to himself, the obsessional himself turns into something like a living dead. He becomes a robot-like creature, apparently drained of desire.

Is not today's society with its insistence on choice (and control that goes with it) in some way privileging an obsessional attitude to life? So instead of saying that there is an increase of psychosis in today's society one can rather conclude that the insistence on choice in all domains of our lives gives rise to obsessive need for control and predictability. By constantly following advice as to how to form one's body, how to curb one's desires, in which directions to guide one's lives and especially how to prevent death, the subject however does not get more certainty and control in his or her life. The flip side of such obsessional mastery is an increase of feeling of guilt and anxiety.

**1** The ideas in this article are further elaborated in my book: Choice, London 2010.

**2** When we hear that children need to be encouraged to develop so called self-worth, we cannot easily escape the feeling that the worth we are talking about here does not fall far away from worth that market deals with.

**3** See Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety, transl. R. Thomte and A.B. Anderson, Princeton 1980.

**4** See Jean Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology, transl. H. E. Barnes, New York 2002.

**5** Sigmund Freud, Extracts from the Fliess papers, Letter 46, May 30, 1896, in: Standard Edition (SE) I, p. 231.

**6** Sigmund Freud, My view of the part played by sexuality in the aetiology of the neuroses, SE VII, p. 275.

**7** More on „choice of neurosis“ in Colette Soler, Hysteria and Obsession, in: Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus (eds.), Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud, Albany 1996.

**8** Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, transl. A. Sheridan, ed. J.-A. Miller, New York 1981, p. 211.

**9** See Miladen Dolar, Beyond Interpellation, in: *Oui Parle* vol. 6 (1993), no. 2, pp. 88–9.

**10** Jacques Lacan developed this theory in his lecture at the University in Milan on May 12, 1972. The original text is unpublished.

**11** One type of critique of late capitalism points out that the consumer is just a semblant of the agent, following only a semblant of freedom. In reality, he or she is under the pressure of demand. Now, this demand is not coming from the Master Signifies, but from the place of *jouissance* – the object small a.

**12** I am indebted to Henrietta Moore for this assessment on U.K. culture.

**13** See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, livre X, L'angoisse (1962–63), Paris 2004, p. 386.

**14** Jacques Alain Miller, Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar on Anxiety, in: *Lacanian ink* 19, Fall 2005, p. 19.

**15** See Ann Meek and Sarah Massini, *I am Special*, I am Me!, New York 2006.

**16** This theme was discussed on John Gray's web site. See <http://www.marsvenus.com>.

**17** See Jean Pierre Lebrun, *Un monde sans limite*. Essai pour une clinique psychanalytique du social, Paris 1997, p. 250. See also: Charles Melman, *L'homme sans gravité: Jouir à tout prix*, Paris 2002.

**18** Enrique Metinides, London, *Photographers Gallery* 2004, p. 22.