
Interview

Sex, ontology, subjectivity: In conversation with Alenka Zupančič

Alenka Zupančič^a and Randall Terada^{b,*}

^aInstitute of Philosophy, Scientific Research Center of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana.

^bLacan Toronto, Toronto Psychoanalytic Society & Institute, 40 St. Clair Avenue East, Suite 203, Toronto, ON M4T 1M9 Canada.

*Corresponding author.

Abstract In this wide-ranging conversation, Alenka Zupančič engages with a number of important themes that animate her current work. Randall Terada begins by asking her first to address the striking connections in her work between sexuality, ontology, and the unconscious. Zupančič then moves on to the Lacanian theme of subjective destitution and her differences with Alain Badiou's theory of the subject. She highlights her most recent work on Kant and offers a subtle critique of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean Laplanche. Zupančič lightens up the discussion somewhat by detailing an Ernst Lubitsch joke to illustrate the significance of the *with-without* for her Lacanian inspired ontology and in doing so points out why the sexes are not two in any meaningful way. Finally, the discussion closes with a candid and accessible commentary on being, multiplicity, and the One and its importance for a politics that is emphatic in its emphasis that it *not* take "nothing" or "non-being" for granted.

Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society (2015) 20, 192–206. doi:10.1057/pcs.2015.16

Keywords: Lacan; Žižek; ontology; real; subjectivity; sexuality

Sex, Ontology, Subjectivity: In Conversation with Alenka Zupančič

The Slovenian psychoanalytic theorist and philosopher Alenka Zupančič visited Toronto in April 2014 to give a talk on sexuality, ontology, and the unconscious. Along with Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, Zupančič has been at the forefront of a political wave of philosophically infused psychoanalytic theory based on the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Their work has had an impact in such diverse areas as ontology and materialism,

ethics, ideological critique, film studies, and theories of the subject. In *Ethics of the Real* (2000), Zupančič uses Kant as the springboard to set out the coordinates of a Lacanian ethical theory that contrasts sharply with the ethical theory of Emmanuel Levinas and the relational ethics of Judith Butler. She has published on Nietzsche, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (2003), Hegel and comedy, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (2008a), a short Lacanian treatise, *Why Psychoanalysis: Three Interventions* (2008b), and a number of incisive theoretical interventions in and around the work of Alain Badiou and Quentin Meillassoux (2004, 2011a). After her talk with *Lacan Toronto*¹ (2014), she graciously took the time to sit down with Randall Terada for a conversation covering her most recent work.

Sexuality and Ontology

RT

I'd like to start off with the question you posed to your Toronto audience today: When Freud discovered sexuality, what did this imply? And what immediately came to mind for me were the famous lines of the judge in that pornography trial: "I don't know how to define it, but I know it when I see it." But this is not your answer at all. In fact, sexuality, if I understood you correctly, isn't a thing; it isn't any type of positivity. In addition to this, you mention the study by Ofra Shalev and Hanoch Yerushalmi (2009) in which there was registered a certain degree of resistance to broaching the subject of sexuality by therapists, due in part to a belief that sexuality was used as a cover or mask to disguise other, "deeper" issues. Also, in this study, two therapists interviewed are quoted as saying that sexual issues should be treated by sexologists and not by psychotherapists (p. 353). It makes me wonder as to what precisely the theoretical status of the Freudian notion of sexuality is today?

AZ

Yes, we talk of sexuality openly, nothing to be ashamed of - it's good for our mental and physical health. Yet with regard to Freud's discovery of the determinant role of the psycho-sexual in our development, we must ask ourselves if it really has been integrated in psychoanalytic practices today, even if in a somewhat diluted form? I think this is far from being the case.

In the Shalev study, therapists tend to believe sexuality serves as a defence against deeper issues such as intimacy and self-identity. Sexual issues are viewed as an impediment to the goals of helping patients adjust to their surroundings and everyday encounters. Sexuality is reduced to the focus on sexual encounters

rather than psycho-sexual aspects of development. Yes, amazingly, two therapists claim that sexual issues should be treated by sexologists and not by psychotherapists. One therapist, in describing one of her patients, states, “It was as if he was thinking ‘This is therapy so I can talk about everything’” (p. 354).

When the Freudian notion of sexuality is reduced to different sexual identities, different sexual practices as constituting whatever ... as sexual intercourse or naughty things that one does or does not do and uses to harass one’s therapist with, then yes, understood in this way, one can almost agree with the claim that sexuality serves as a defence against deeper and more difficult issues. The irony is that, for Freud, sexuality was a deeper and more difficult issue behind different sexual practices, something inherently problematic and precisely disruptive of identity. There is no sexual identity; sexuality is the very thing that disrupts all identity. Freud said that only a very small portion of unsatisfied sexual tendencies can find an outlet in coitus or other sexual acts. The point is that this very *impossibility* of full sexual satisfaction in the absence of all external obstacles is precisely a constitutive part of unconscious sexuality as such; it is not something to be filled in by something else.

RT

Your *Lacan Toronto* talk covers some important themes around sexuality, ontology, and the unconscious. Could you elaborate a bit on these themes?

AZ

There are two levels in which I tackle this question of sexuality and the unconscious. One is to try to reintroduce the psychoanalytical discussion of sexuality, how sex is to be treated not simply as practice, because often in the move from sexual difference to gender difference there is something that gets lost. Joan Copjec (2012) has a good argument here. There is a certain ontological questioning that gets lost in the contemporary discussion that moves a bit too quickly from sexuality to gender performativity and gender identity in general.

The sexual is not a separate domain of human activity or human life. Sexuality is something that exists in-itself only as something other. Sexuality is the very out-of-itselfness of being. What is most disturbing in the Freudian discovery is not the emphasis on sexuality, the emphasis on dirty matters; more disturbing was the ontologically uncertain character of sexuality itself. So when I say that *sexuality is constitutively unconscious*, I refer to some fundamental negativity implied in sexuality, yet which gives, as such, a structure to the unconscious.

The cause of embarrassment in sexuality is not simply something which is there, on display, in it. But on the contrary, something that precisely is not there. For example, the fairy tales we recite to explain sexuality to children are not there so much to distort the realistic explanation, but to mask the fact that there is no

completely realistic explanation. Even the most exhaustive scientific explanation lacks the signifier that would account for the sexual *as sexual*. It is here that the short circuit between the epistemological and the ontological takes place. *For this epistemological lapse is at the same time ontological.*

So the question of something missing does not concern a missing piece of knowledge about the sexual as a full entity in-itself. It relates to the sexual as not fully constituted in-itself, and, for this reason, *constitutively unconscious*. Unconscious sexuality is this short-circuit between epistemological and ontological levels; it is nothing else but the form of existence of negativity in which they overlap. And culture is not simply a mask of the sexual; it is a mask for this ontological lapse, for something in the sexual which is not, in the sense of not fully constituted, not there. If for Freud the unconscious is by definition sexual, this is not because it always has a sexual content, but because its properly ontological lapse, this break or hole, is only transmitted by sexuality.

So the more ambitious project is to think all this in more general terms of ontology, the ontological questioning as such, and to look for a different articulation, in that the statement I'm making goes something like this: There is something in being itself, in being in general, that dictates or is in play, at least in the very way in which being itself appears. Why does it appear as it appears? At a certain level, again, you are really faced with the question of the relationship between ontology and epistemology. Appearance is not just a subjective constitution of reality; there is also something in the very reality that dictates this kind of constitution, as if there is something on the ontological level that is involved in the very way being appears.

Subjective Destitution

RT

In your book *Ethics of the Real*, you make a cogent case for an interpretation of Kant's moral law based on the register of the *real*. My understanding is that an ethical subjectivity is one that has undergone or "gone through" a radical desubjectivation, as when you state, for example, the "passage through the impossible point of one's own non-being ... where it seems that one can say of oneself only 'I am not'" (p. 32). This has been called by a number of Lacanian commentators "subjective destitution" and has emerged in various forms, particularly in the context of identifying the precise theoretical status of the Lacanian subject. For example, Žižek mentions the Muselmann in the Nazi concentration camps, the figure of Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and of course your treatment of the character of Sygne de Coûfontaine and Antigone in your *Ethics of the Real*. Though extremely varied, what they all have in common

is a reduction to that precise Cartesian moment of madness, the loss of one's substantial identity, of one's very substance, the loss of the most precious kernel of one's individuality. This moment resides between nature and culture; it is neither nature nor culture yet a necessary moment that must happen if a subject is to emerge. You cite here Kant's statement that "a man to become not merely legally but morally a good man requires a kind of rebirth, a creation *ex nihilo*" (Kant, 1960, pp. 42-43). What is "subjective destitution" and perhaps could you also speak a bit to your differences with Alain Badiou concerning the formation of an "ethical subjectivity"?

AZ

Subjective destitution points to the discontinuity in the subject. The subject emerges in this ethical dimension. It is precisely through the figure of Synge de Coûfontaine that I was able to think this through. It is this idea that subjective destitution is induced by some kind of event, and it is out of this that some kind of dimension of something which was simply not part of the configuration before, now is present. There is a choice that becomes possible that was not there before. So when one speaks about desubjectivation or subjective destitution, we must not make the mistake of thinking that you start with a subject and then you have a whole movement to destitute it and then you're left with what? This is a mistake. Destitution of the subject *precedes* subjectivity. You don't start with subject and then go about its dismantling. It is not as if whatever subjectivity there is, it is there on behalf of the destitution. The notion of the subject is related to this radical negativity, but it isn't as if we have to destitute the subject, as if we are persons and then we have to destitute ourselves.

Take Deleuze: for him the subject needs to be related to something affirmative, and so he may give the impression that negativity is bad, a "no" to everything. But the negativity I am talking about and striving to articulate is a negativity which, as such, is the underpinning of something. It is not as if first we get rid of something. On the contrary, it is through this radical negativity that something appears. It is not a choice: either you are negative, you say no, or you are affirmative, you say yes. This is a bad way of putting it. The subject is not simply negative or simply positive; it can only appear or take place through this radical negativity. One can't separate the two.

Destitution is about a surplus that comes out of this negativity. It is precisely the very point through which some newness emerges through this destitution, as a new possibility. The political reproach one gets is this criticism: "Ok, but what do we do with this?" But it's not supposed to be a recipe: it's not ok, let's now destitute the subject. It is always *après coup*; it's always afterwards. When you see the trace of the subject, you follow it because you can be sure that something has already happened there. Another mistake is that some people think this destitution is a kind of worshipping of the ultimate sacrifice that one can make of

oneself. But this is misguided; the temporality of this is twisted. One should precisely not take this as a kind of recipe or prescription, but rather as a picturing of what happens when something happens.

RT

Yes, I agree. Subjective destitution is not a sacrificial ordeal, as if we descend to this place with candles and altars and a low murmuring chorus. No, rather, subjective destitution is only revealed retroactively, and, as such, the moment may appear as a *vanishing mediator* to the birth of the new subject. So the precise temporal moment when the subject emerged is virtually impossible to pin down because the symbolic coordinates have so altered that to say, “I had to do such and such because of such and such...” now becomes either a fitting rationalization, or a romantic aside, or simply nonsensical within a radically reconfigured symbolic framework. On this note, with regard to their respective views on the subject, what do you think are the main differences between Lacan and Badiou?

AZ

Badiou’s subject is conceptualized as something subsequent to the Event. One thing is that, first of all, for Lacan, subjectivity is not simply this post-evental thing, but is also related to reality as such, as the point of its symptomatic impasse. For example, in Badiou, first you have this banal reality where there is nothing really interesting, human animal existence, nothing happens, but with Lacan you get a very different picture of reality. For Lacan, what is crucial is that this banal reality is already traversed by all kinds of antagonisms, by all kinds of impasses. Social reality is antagonistic and there are rifts and divisions, and the subject is not simply a kind of pathological subjective response but is a symptomatic point where this antagonism, be it social or familial, is actually present as a subjective figure with its own symptoms. The symptoms psychoanalysis works with are certain antagonisms that structure the field of being in general; symptoms are not simply some kind of subjective pathology, but have an objective dimension, an antagonism that is constitutive of the historical moment.

This notion of subject can’t be reduced to the figure of the human animal because what it carries is this link to this negativity or madness that is suppressed for things to function.

It is obvious, for Lacan, when you speak of everyday reality and its problems – internal antagonisms, struggles, etc. – we can’t think of this without the notion of subject in the stronger sense of the word. It is not just a subjective response to injustice, but the way this injustice exists for the reality within which it appears.

RT

For example, a fundamental premise of a Lacanian inspired ontology is that reality is criss-crossed by a fundamental antagonism; reality is split, not-all. And how this social antagonism gets represented or “appears” comes down to a hegemonic struggle. Žižek *et al* (2000) cites an example from Lévi-Strauss’s *Structural Anthropology* about the Winnebago, one of the Great Lakes tribes, split into two groups: those “above” and those “below.” When asked to draw the ground plan of their village, they gave two very different accounts. Žižek then argues that the two perceptions of the ground plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavours to cope with this traumatic antagonism, and represents an attempt by each group to heal this “wound” via the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure captured in their respective ground plans (p. 112).

Kant’s Categorical Imperative and Ontological Negativity

RT

I’d like to move on to your recent talk at Villanova University (2013) that was based on Kant’s moral law, and where you introduced a concept called the *non-realized*. I understand this to be about ontology, specifically that which is neither being nor non-being. If I understand you, you’re saying Kant’s imperative, “Do your duty,” implies no higher reason; the choice of an alternative does not exist outside the categorical imperative, and this fact is what tends to be forgotten once I do what I believe is my duty. For example, Kant’s categorical imperative isn’t an instrument we use to judge between possible alternatives and which helps us choose the most ethical one. Instead “Do your duty” means there is but one choice, and this choice is absolutely necessary. Am I right to say that there is a connection here between freedom and absolute necessity that you’re trying to make?

AZ

I agree, the Kantian duty does not mean that everything is already laid out for you as part of reality, and you just have to figure out what is right, with Kant’s categorical imperative pointing you at the right direction. No, it is rather something that opens up or introduces something that is not already there; in this way it introduces a new element. Or, perhaps more precisely, it splits the reality in a new way, which allows for something else than the usual sum of its elements. One could rethink Kant in this way instead of taking the categorical imperative as a kind of recipe for action, which is not the best Kant. If one reduces

Kant to this, one loses an important dimension. I use the term “non-realized” in much the same sense as Lacan (1998) uses it when, in the *Seminar XI*, he speaks about the unconscious pertaining to the order of the non-realized. “Non-realized” does not imply something which is waiting to be realized, but rather refers to a *negativity underpinning everything that happens* (or is realized). It is not something not yet born, which will be born at some later point, for instance, once you’re in analysis. Rather, it is that something happens ontologically before something emerges as *being qua being*. That is, *we need to somehow circumscribe or think the very negativity that is very much involved in structuring the positive order of being*.

I thus went back to Kant through this perspective of how to think the categorical imperative in relationship to this ontological negativity, suggesting that we understand *the ethical imperative as just this, the structural place and holder of this very negativity*. Kant’s starting point is that the categorical imperative is not grounded in any higher instance (like God) nor any kind of pre-established Good. There is nothing “above” it. With our postmodern reflexes, we tend to read this as a relativization – God is dead, so everything is permitted and everybody can have his or her personal ethics. But what I think is revolutionary about Kant, and German idealism in general, is that it places at this point the very *birth of the absolute* (a new absolute), in which the necessary and the contingent are no longer opposed. *The categorical imperative is absolute precisely because it is not grounded in anything other than itself*. This implies, however, that we are responsible not only for our actions, but above all for what we refer to as our duty. We cannot hide behind our duty and say, “I’m sorry, I was only fulfilling my duty.”

Separation

RT

Moving back to your *Lacan Toronto* (2014) talk, you make an ingenious play on the word “navel.” Firstly, you point out, artists in the early Renaissance faced the question as to whether they should portray Adam and Eve with or without navels. If Adam was created in the image of God, portraying him with a navel meant God had a navel. Artists simply dodged the question by drawing fig leaves to cover over not only sexual organs but navels as well. This is a perfect illustration of your argument, artists covering up a deep ambiguity pertaining to the sexual, as you say, “covering up something that is not and also inseparable from it” (2014). You also mention, in Freud’s work, his reference to the dream’s navel. And one could also draw a reference to Laplanche’s (1999) enigmatic signifiers. Could you elaborate here on this deep ambiguity and its relation to psychoanalysis?

AZ

With regard to analysis, it is not only about interpreting, deciphering the “true” meanings; the interpretation also has to produce its own limit, that is to say, encircle and locate the very points that constitute the meaningless navel of the field of meaning, or of the field of the Other, and induce a separation here. This separation implies, to put it simply, that the subject will not find the answer to what he is in the Other (nor in himself), but is only likely to find or encounter it in the form of an indivisible remainder of his actions in relation to the Other. In this configuration, the Other no longer appears as the Other of an enigmatic message (as per Laplanche). Now, at this very moment, the opacity of the field of the Other no longer “interpellates” the subject to find its possible meanings, but should incite the engagement of the subject in his own destiny as always-already social, that is, as always-already taking place in the field of the Other and irreducibly connected to it. The crucial moment of “separation” involved in psychoanalysis should be understood in this sense: not as a simple separation *from* the Other, from all symbolic structures and the social mediation of the subject’s being, but as the separation of the Other from *the object that drives its structure* (Zupančič, 2008b). I’m thinking here of what Lacan says, for example, in *Seminar XX* (1999), when he claims that “the aim of my teaching is... to dissociate *a* and *A*.... It is here that a scission or detachment remains to be effectuated” (p. 83). If this “separation” does not take place, the Other continues to function as a full, non-barred Other, as the field of necessity, (self-)containing its own Reason. Whereas the scission operated here separates the Other from its cause, placing the latter both out of the realm of the subject and out of the realm of the Other, that is, placing it at the point of their impossible intersection.

RT

Another crucial difference from Laplanche then being that his notion of an *enigmatic signifier* elides too easily into a version of relational ethics — the enigma of the Other — that you are at odds with.

AZ

There is a whole school of contemporary ethical reflection, inspired more or less directly by Emmanuel Levinas, which has as its central point precisely the affirmation (and fortification) of the enigma of the Other. In this ethics, the subject is confronted, or has to be confronted with, the enigma of the Other – a Demand in relation to which the subject is absolutely responsible. Psychoanalysis brings to light the fact that the constitution of the enigma of the Other, the elevation of the latter to the place of an infinite enigmatic Demand, is the precise counterpart of (primal) repression. *However, to recognize the necessity of*

repression in the constitution of the subject is not the same as to promote repression to the rank of the highest ethical maxim. Which is exactly what a Levinasian ethics does. The ethics based on the Other as the locus of an infinite enigmatic demand/message is an ethics that elevates repression to the level of an ethical principle. In this sense, it is definitely foreign to the ethics of psychoanalysis. This logic of endlessly supplementing the lack in the Other, which has the effect of intensifying the Demand of the Other, is what brings Levinasian ethics dangerously close to what Freud describes as the vicious cycle of the superego.²

A Guy Walks into a Restaurant...

RT

In response to the theorists of gender performativity, you make the claim that there is no sexual identity per se. Rather, sexuality is the very thing that disrupts all identity. And I think your recourse to an Ernst Lubitsch joke makes this point rather well. A nice introduction to this joke is from your *Sexual Difference and Ontology* (2012a):

Psychoanalysis is not the science of sexuality. It doesn't tell us what sex really is; it tells us that there is no "really" of the sex. But this nonexistence is not the same as, say, the nonexistence of the unicorn. It is a nonexistence in the real that, paradoxically, leaves traces in the real. It is a void that registers in the real. It is a nothing, or negativity, with consequences.

And the joke:

A guy goes into a restaurant and says to the waiter, "Coffee without cream, please." The waiter replies, "I am sorry sir, but we are out of cream. Could it be without milk?" (2008b, p.41.)

AZ

Sexuality is that cream whose non-being does not reduce it to a mere nothing. It is a nothing that walks around, makes trouble, and leaves traces. I think what is usually lost to thought in the ontological discussion is not some being which is left out, but a *singular kind of nothing* or negativity because of which coffee without cream is not the same as coffee without milk. It has (or can have) a positive, albeit spectral, quality, which can be formulated in the precise terms of "*with-without* (cream)" as irreducible to both alternatives (cream/no cream).

I understand Hegel as saying that negation is part of the positive identity of an object. An object is not only what it is; you have to include what it is not. It is a nonexistence in the real that, paradoxically, leaves traces in the real. It is a void that registers in the real. *It is a nothing, or negativity, with consequences.* And it is precisely this “there is no,” this non-being, which nevertheless has real consequences, that is lost in translation when we pass from sex to gender (see Zupančič, 2012a).

Being and the Ontological Impasse of Sexuality

RT

Not only from sex to gender, but this *with-without* I believe has come to define a thematic core in your present work. In order to make this point, I need to first go back to a 2011 conference in Berlin with yourself, Mladen Dolar, and Slavoj Žižek (the “Troika” as Žižek calls your group), in which there was strong emphasis placed on a very abstract theme surrounding the notion of “being” and how being is usually and intuitively thought of as One, that is, unified, everything, without gap. Mention was made of Parmenides on the one hand and Alain Badiou on the other. The point that was hammered home was your strong disagreement with any ontology that begins from One. As I understand this debate, you claim that being is ontologically incomplete, and this ontological incompleteness means that the One comes secondarily. The One is an operation, Žižek (2012) states:

For Alenka and me, of course there is no original One, but this absence is inscribed in the multiplicity from the very beginning. It does not mean “We are multiple screw the One!” It means the One as absence is already here. Ontologically the zero level is a barred One, there is no One. There is multiplicity because One cannot be One.

Multiplicity happens because One cannot be One. There is an inherent rift in being that is neither being nor non-being, a *with-without* of sorts. And it is this inherent rift in being, or rift in One, that is the Lacanian real. Perhaps another way of announcing this is your piece on Freud’s *Verneinung*, or negation (2012b). The famous moment in the dream when the analysand retorts: “You ask who the person in the dream could be. It’s not my mother.” Your analysis of this moment shows that it is much too simple to stay within the simple binary of either mother or not-mother. As you state,

We are dealing here precisely with something like, “it is not not-mother,” and this double negation circumscribes something that makes it irreducible to simply “mother” (or her absence). “It is not not-mother” is not the same

as “(it is) mother,” a difference that is crucial for psychoanalysis, since the unconscious is to be situated precisely in this odd, fragile dimension.³

Again, here we are dealing with a dimension of the *with-without*. If we want to understand the unconscious, we need to understand this principle of negation, which is not simply the opposite of affirmation. And if I’m not mistaken, this *with-without* could be taken to be the key component upon which your ontology rests; in other words, it represents that which must be subtracted from being in order for *being qua being* to emerge. And so this is why we cannot start at One; this is why we must start at *less than One*. Another way of putting this is with regard to sexual difference. And this takes us back to your *Lacan Toronto* discussion. If I understand you, the non-all of being means there is no simple two of the sexes?

AZ

The sexes are not two in any meaningful way. Sexuality does not fall into two parts; it does not constitute a one. It is stuck between “no longer one” and “not yet two (or more).” I would say that it revolves around the fact that “the other sex doesn’t exist” (and this is to say that the difference is not ontologizable), yet there is more than one (which is also to say, “more than multiple ones”).

RT

Yes, if sexual difference were ontologizable, we would get something like Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, wouldn’t we?

AZ

Precisely. And my claim is, further, that if we simply replace two with a multiplicity (and claim that there are more than two sexes), we do not get out of this same logic of ontologization. We affirm that there *are* many sexes, and miss the very ontological impasse involved in sexuality. Which brings us back to the point you mentioned earlier, in relation to the conference in Berlin. It is not simply that we think ontology cannot begin with One (this point is not very controversial), it is that we also think it cannot begin simply with “multiplicity,” conceived as a kind of original neutrality. This is the real core of this debate. I believe the alternative between One and the multiple is a wrong alternative. We cannot go here into details of this argument, but the basic idea is this: ontology begins, not with One and not with multiplicity, but with a “minus One” (Lacan talks of *l’un en moins* in Seminar XX, 1999, p.129). Multiplicity is already a consequence of this paradoxical minus One, which is not, but structures the field of what is. In this sense multiplicity is never simply neutral, but biased by that original negativity, and hence antagonistic. The way this structuring negativity

(or ontological impossibility as inseparable from ontology) exists in the world is in the form of an impossible two, that is, in the form of sexual difference which cannot be ontologized, posited in terms of difference between two beings, two ontological entities. Sexual difference in the strictly Lacanian sense of the term is the way in which the minus One, as negativity structuring the realm of being, gets to be formulated within this very being as its point of paradoxical impossibility. My point is not: there are only two sexes, but rather: there is only the split, the antagonism. Antagonism is not simply antagonism between two things, but also, and more fundamentally, what structures the field in which these things appear. You mentioned Slavoj's example from Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology*, which is also a perfect example of this difficult, counter-intuitive point according to which antagonism somehow precedes the (two) sides of the antagonism. If the two village groups draw two completely different maps of the village, the answer is not to take a helicopter ride and try to look from above at how the village looks "objectively." The point is, as Slavoj said, to recognize that the two perceptions of the ground plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavours to cope with this traumatic antagonism, and they represent an attempt by each group to heal this "wound" via the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure captured in their respective ground plans. Similarly, the narratives about what is "masculine" and what is "feminine" are precisely attempts at coping with this kind of traumatic antagonism by staging it as a difference between two kinds of being. Which is why it is not enough to dismiss "masculinity" and "femininity" as symbolic constructions (which they certainly are), but one also has to recognize the real (the antagonism) that propels, motivates these constructions.

RT

Alenka, thank you for taking the time to speak with me today.

Acknowledgement

Randall Terada would like to thank Alenka Zupančič for responding graciously to repeated requests for her time, over and above the initial interview that took place in Toronto, and also Concetta Principe, Ines Anderson and Carlos Rivas for their help in the early draft stages, and to Dr. Judith Hamilton for locating and providing a crucial secondary source.

About the Authors

Alenka Zupančič is a Research Adviser at the Institute of Philosophy, Scientific Research Center of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana. She is

also a professor at the European Graduate School, Saas Fee. She is the author of a number of articles and books on psychoanalysis and philosophy, including *Ethics of the Real. Kant, Lacan; The Shortest Shadow. Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two; The Odd One In. On Comedy; Why Psychoanalysis? Three Interventions.*

Randall Terada currently co-lectures with Dr. Judith Hamilton in the *Lacan Unpacked* series featured at *Lacan Toronto*. His Ph.D. dissertation was an application of Lacan's concept *objet (a)* to critique Judith Butler's relational ethics. Most recently, he has published a review article on the Lacanian film theorist Todd McGowan, contributed an article on universality to *The Žižek Dictionary* (2013, Acumen), and published the article "Subject of the Drive, Ethics of the Real" in the recent anthology of the Canadian Network for Psychoanalysis and Culture (2015), available online.

Notes

- 1 *Lacan Toronto* is a diverse group of academics, students, analysts, therapists and counsellors who regularly meet in Toronto to study and discuss the work of Jacques Lacan. They frequently invite speakers to address contemporary theoretical and clinical issues from a Lacanian perspective.
- 2 For a lengthier discussion of both Laplanche and Levinas, see Zupančič (2008a, b).
- 3 See Zupančič (2011b, 2012b) for a well argued and trenchant analysis of Freud's *Verneinung* (negation).

References

- Copjec, J. (2012) The sexual compact. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 17(2): 31–48.
- Kant, I. (1960; orig. 1793) *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Lacan, J. (1998) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Book XI)*. Translated by A. Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Lacan, J. (1999) Encore. In: J-A Miller (ed.) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*. Translated by B. Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Laplanche, J. (1999) *Essays on Otherness*. London: Routledge.
- Shalev, O. and Yerushalmi, H. (2009) Status of sexuality in contemporary psychoanalytic psychotherapy as reported by therapists. *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 26(4): 343–361.
- Žižek, S., Butler, J. and Laclau, E. (2000) *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2012) Being and subjectivity. Paper presented at the European Graduate School, 8 July, Saas-Fee, Switzerland. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/videos/being-and-subjectivity/>, accessed 4 December 2012.
- Zupančič, A. (2000) *Ethics of the Real*. London: Verso.

- Zupančič, A. (2003) *The Shortest Shadow. Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Zupančič, A. (2004) The fifth condition. In: P. Hallward (ed.) *Think Again. Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*. London: Continuum.
- Zupančič, A. (2008a) *The Odd One In*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Zupančič, A. (2008b) *Why Psychoanalysis: Three Interventions*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.
- Zupančič, A. (2011a) Realism in psychoanalysis. Paper presented at the one divides into two: Dialectics, Negativity & Clinamen Conference, 28-30 March, Berlin. <https://www.ici-berlin.org/videos/one-divides-into-two/part/8/>, accessed 6 May 2012.
- Zupančič, A. (2011b) This is not my mother. Paper presented at the one divides into two: Dialectics, Negativity & Clinamen Conference, 28-30 March, Berlin. <https://www.ici-berlin.org/videos/one-divides-into-two/part/23/>, accessed 6 May 2012.
- Zupančič, A. (2012a) Sexual difference and ontology. *e-flux journal* 32. http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8948423.pdf, accessed 6 May 2012.
- Zupančič, A. (2012b) Not-mother: On Freud's Verneinung. *e-flux journal* 33. http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8950992.pdf, accessed 4 May 2012.
- Zupančič, A. (2013) Tarrying with the imperative. Paper presented at Apocalyptic Politics: Framing the Present, 12 April, Villanova University, Philadelphia, PA.
- Zupančič, A. (2014) Sexuality and the lapse in being. Paper presented at *Lacan Toronto*, 16 March, Toronto.