

CLAUDIA REICHE

**Tanja Ostojić: ~~Black Square on White.~~
From *Mehrlust* to Nausea and Back**

Translated by Dream Coordination Office (Lisa Rosenblatt and Charlotte Eckler)

1.

There's a connection between Lacanian »mehrlust« (*surplus enjoyment*) and the term »mehrwert« (*surplus value*). Missing the mark, or the inherent impossibility of (complete) enjoyment is that which creates ever new possibilities for pleasure for the subject, even those pleasures that go beyond the mere »use value« of pleasures via a »surplus (*mehr*)« of pleasure: This is what Jacques Lacan calls »plus-de-jouir,« translated as »mehrlust« or »surplus enjoyment« (Lacan 1970: 87).¹ In this, one cannot assume an equal balance of pleasure; for example, following an intuitive assumption that little pleasure means little satisfaction. Instead, what holds true is that the more remote the pleasure, the more surplus of enjoyment there is. *Mehrlust*, like *mehrwert*—the central motivational force of capitalism in a Marxist formulation—thus follows an excessive logic.

Slavoj Žižek explains this mechanism of surplus pleasure using the most common capitalist object there is, *Coca-Cola*, the commodity par excellence: »It is no surprise that Coke was first introduced as a medicine—its strange taste does not seem to provide any particular satisfaction; it is not directly pleasing and endearing; however, it is precisely as such, as transcending any immediate use value... that Coke functions as the direct embodiment of ›it‹, of the pure surplus of enjoyment over standard satisfactions, of the mysterious and elusive X we are all after in our compulsive consumption of merchandise. The unexpected result of this feature is... this very superfluous character that makes our thirst for Coke all the more insatiable... Coke has the paradoxical property that the more

you drink, the thirstier you get, the greater your need to drink more—with that strange, bitter-sweet taste, our thirst is never effectively quenched.« (Žižek 2000: 22) Through *Diet Coke*, which has since been outdone by *Coke Zero* with »Real Coca-Cola taste and zero calories,«² »Coke Zero: a Taste of Life, as it Should Be,«³ Žižek develops the thesis that the interest in *Coke Zero* has to do with the addictive feature of the void. It is the enticement of wanting to »drink the Nothingness itself« (Žižek 2000: 23). The screenshot (fig. 1: *Coke Zero* TV commercial, *Das Leben, wie es sein sollte* [Life as it should be], director's cut, 2007) vividly shows that the moment just before grabbing the bottle is an opportune moment, on the basis of which the differentiation between the desired and at the same time unbearable »Nothingness« and »not-reaching« can be thought of visually *and* structurally: as still in suspension.

A relationship between the three concepts especially interesting to us here can be developed from the *Diet Coke* example: »That of Marxist *surplus-value*, that of Lacanian *objet petit a* as surplus-enjoyment ... and the paradox of the superego, perceived long ago by Freud: The more Coke you drink, the thirstier you are; the more profit you make, the more you want; the more you obey the superego command, the guiltier you are—in all three cases, the logic of balanced exchange is disturbed in favour of an excessive logic of ›the more you give (the more you repay your debts), the more you owe‹ (or, ›the more you have what you long for, the more you lack, the greater your craving‹).« (Žižek 2000: 24) The key to Žižek's depiction is Jacques Lacan's concept of the *objet petit a*: »The nearer you get to it, the more it eludes your grasp (or the more you possess it, the greater the lack).« (Žižek 2000: 24)

That simply means: Nothing stabilizes subjects and society more than escaping from enjoyment as a paradoxical motor for ever more consumption and surplus enjoyment. According to Žižek's reading of Lacan, this is one of the reasons for the tenacity and continued existence of the capitalist system. From such Nothingness, comes, after all, as much profit, for example, as is gained from commodities that no one needs. But what exactly do we mean by »need« when we're speaking of desire?

Mehrlust, as Lacan's application of the principle of *mehrwert* to the paradoxical and excessive economy of desire, could thus, along the lines of this parallel, be applied as an economic formulation of »queer,« also in reference to the concept of the symposium.⁴ There are several approaches in terms of this application of economy to queerness (and vice-versa), which corresponding with the opening of this text, amount to the question: Is queer another name for *mehrlust*—an *objet petit a*—and would this, moreover, be a possibility for a method that maintains a critical stance toward knowledge? If »Nothingness« and an excessive logic were to fuel queer, would that mean: The more scientification and institutionalization

of queer are carried out, the less this paradoxical void—origin (of) queer—is reached. Thus, the more that theory attempts to grasp queer, the more it evades description. Only with cunning and at a risk to academics and science can the respective *objet petit a* of theoretical efforts (like that of ›feminism,‹ too, for example) be approached. This occurs when perception is based on queer as it emerges in readings, in desires, in order to realize queer as a method in art and theory. Queer would then be created as interpretation in the broadest sense: in retrospect—and as if it had always already been there.

Concerning *objet petit a* and the subject, which are correlative in this regard, once again we turn to Žižek: »The *objet petit a* as cause is an *an-sich*, which resists subjectivation—symbolization, yet is far from ›being independent of the subject;‹ instead, it is ... the shadow of the subject below the object, a kind of placeholder for the subject, a pure form that makes do without any individual consistency In other words, ›interaction‹ describes ... that cycle in which the symbolic network of effects retrospectively sets its traumatic cause. We thereby arrive at the most concise definition possible of the subject: The subject is an effect that posits its cause entirely on its own.« (Žižek 1995: 68)

Queer is, then—I want to suggest—an effect that creates its cause entirely on its own. The only valid criteria is, accordingly, the process, the how. How do I generate and at the same time find queer?

In the following, as I explore the question of queer using the example of an artwork, Tanja Ostojić's work *Black Square on White* (2001; photo from the series *Personal Space*, 1996; fig. 2) priority is not given to the intention of the artist; of equal importance is the process of interpretation. Queer or not, that is the question whose assessment I have to give here, with hope of retroactive transformation.

2.

Tanja Ostojić's work *Black Square on White* (2001; fig. 2) was a part of the four-day performance *I'll Be Your Angel* during the Venice Biennale 2001 (fig. 3). According to the artist's own statement, for the performance she allowed Harald Szeemann the curator at the time, an exclusive look at her pubic hair, which was shaved into a square. The curator's privileged view should (in the function of witness and recognition) add the work to the list of the official artworks. Ostojić offers her public, intimate appearance with Szeemann at the Biennale, namely as an accompanying or protective ›angel‹ as she dubs herself with the title *I'll Be Your Angel*, in a telling connection with his authorial view of her body. Ostojić's own description explains:

»Black Square on White ... [is] made of pubic hair on my Venus Hill.... Only the Biennale director, Mr. Harald Szeemann, will have the right to see this ›hidden Malevich‹ in order to declare it an official part of the 49th Venice Biennale. Walking around Venice during opening days, elegantly dressed, my work of art will be hidden.... ›I'll Be Your Angel‹ consists of my accompanying Mr. Szeemann during the opening days around Venice (including cocktails, dinners, press conferences). I will be naturally performing as his escort—his Angel. This piece... poses potential ambiguous narratives concerning the scandalous artist (and the curator). It provokes an invitation/invasion, and questions the power structure in the art world.... The structure of the piece is the process of mystery, both personal and public, encased in the glossy gossip of artworld whispers.«⁵

In its reception, the work has been repeatedly treated as a critique of the capitalist art industry and heteronormative gender relations;⁶ especially through its use of something that is called subversive affirmation or even over-identification, and in this sense, is considered »queer.«⁷ Before I agree with this verdict for other reasons, it seems to me of interest that my encounter with *I'll Be Your Angel* began with a disturbance. The approach to the depictions of Ostojić's work set off a certain type of repulsion in me. I was repulsed by the request for me to envision a sexualized scenario of glances exchanged between artist and curator and to applaud this as a contribution to overcoming heteronormativity. The dubious pleasure of an alienating (in my case lesbian) view of conventional relationships was something that I had habitualized on my own accord. Yet could I really distance myself far enough from the fantasy that *I'll Be Your Angel* palms off on me as I wanted to?

In order to use this repulsion as a way of arriving at knowledge, I cite a philosophic-psychoanalytic critique and analysis by the artist and philosopher Marina Gržinić, which is what first created knowledge of the work for me:

»Meanwhile, during the opening days of the Biennale, Ostojić elegantly dressed, acted as the Angel/Escort ... of Mr. Szeemann, publicly exhibiting herself near him, while the artwork, the pubic Malevich, stayed discretely hidden.... Some feminists were furious that she exposed her ... body as an object.... Contrary to such a legitimate, but ›traditional‹ way of understanding an Ostojić happening ... as a perverted self-instrumentalisation ..., I want to develop ... alternative approaches ... [It] is *the authentic act of traversing the fantasy*.... Power reproduces itself only through a form of self-distance, by relying on the obscene, disavowed fantasies, rules and practices that are in conflict with its publicly visible, installed norms.... One possible strategy is Žižekian over-identification with the power edifice: acting in such a way as to overtly stage the phantasmal scenarios that are ... incited, ... but not made public. This means that if the art power edifice is relying on obscenity

and promiscuity, and if this is the whole story regarding art and its power, then the proposed process of over-identification will exaggeratedly display precisely this in the public realm.... Ostojić performed exactly such an act. An authentic act Between her legs, the real/impossible kernel of the art/power machine has received the only possible appearance in flesh and blood.« (Gržinić 2005: 172-175)

Marina Gržinić thus suggests that the work be interpreted as a tactic of over-identification, rather than rejecting it as a »perverted self-instrumentalization«; interpreting it as an authentic act of traversing a fundamental fantasy that could lie at the base of »power« and, especially, the »art edifice« as hidden »obscenity and promiscuity« now made public and questioned. This of course effectuates a recognition as an accomplice of that which holds the »art/power edifice« together as an obscene, yet denied *wunschproduktion*: and that this *wunschproduktion* in general, and the individual case, are considered as identical. According to Marina Grzinić, only the public act of an authentic traversing of these universal obscene scenarios that are constantly triggered, yet officially not made public, subverts subjugation under precisely this system.

Such a traversal, however, does not correspond to that which I seek as a queer process in art and theory. Perhaps my repulsion can be explained by the relationship that would seem to close the gap between this art-historical categorizing and the discourse surrounding Tanja Ostojić. Ostojić presents an object that functions as bait. She calls it a form of seduction with which she aims to create »artworld whispers« through a suggested scandal. Yet this is also bait for art-theoretical presentations, even those that view this work as queer. Let us take a closer look:

When she states, »This piece provokes an invitation/invasion, and questions the power structure in the art world,« Ostojić thereby presents the work as an inviting feminine object for an invasion of the public's fantasies. Marina Gržinić's analysis begins here, invades, as it were. However, what Ostojić keeps suspended in the risky state of identification, or over-identification, with the possible changing of places, has yielded to a simplification in the interpretation by Marina Gržinić. The over-identifying process can, however, be described precisely as an *invention* of factualities that includes the temptation to invade the production of »true«—authentic, revealing, symptomatic—reactions.⁸ I would like, then, to show a misunderstanding in Marina Gržinić's interpretation and, at the same time, recognize its authenticity as mediation.

An »authentic act,« as Marina Gržinić deems the work of Tanja Ostojić, means nothing less than a Lacanian analytic assessment that an artist has not given ground relative to her desire.⁹ Because she is convinced of the authenticity *and* the seamless success of Ostojić's work, in her interpretation she even speaks of the formation of a »real/impossible kernel of the art/

power machine« as the *only* possible, *only* successful form in this same work. For one thing, it must be said that »art as such is always organized around the central void of the impossible real thing« (Žižek 2000b: 216). For another, Marina Gržinić attests to an exemplary fulfillment of an artistic intention that is, *per definition*, unreachable: »Between her legs, the real/impossible kernel of the art/power machine has received the only possible appearance in flesh and blood.« That would not be art but rather the appearance of a thereby no longer impossible reality, the art theorist as psychotic witness to a miracle.¹⁰

Objections can be made especially to the formulation »only possible appearance in flesh and blood«: Is the »appearance« here really »flesh and blood« or is the form of the work to be found between pubic hair and its cut, the words and pictures of the artist, between artist and photographer, art historical texts and seducing media effects, just to name a few? Also, in the locus »between the legs« a displacement has taken place that alters the work: There was never a black square between the legs,¹¹ since this is to be found on the Venus mound. Quite the contrary, a suggested spreading of the legs, which would open up a view between the thighs, blocks the view of the square. Instead, in Marina Gržinić's view, the imaginary scheme of a (visually) naturalized penetration of female genitals as the only possible »appearance« of the »art/power machine« in »flesh and blood« is applied thus fading the view of the *Black Square on White*. There is no commentary on the identificatory, imaginary operation in the interpretative process, for example, as a process of »realizing« the work. I think that the work by Tanja Ostojić, as Marina Gržinić reads it, cannot be described as queer. How would it have to be read then?

3.

My attempt to deal with the work *I'll Be Your Angel* also aims at attending to my affect of repulsion, the embarrassment and uncertainty with which Tanja Ostojić deals, as I take it up. I am concerned above all with an authentic act of traversing the work and not all at once the »fundamental fantasy.« Authenticity as criterion for assessment can only function if the authenticity of an act is separated from understanding the artist's over-identification. Otherwise, the normative force of a psychological assessment inevitably becomes a key aesthetic criterion. When over-identification is understood as calculated and anti-psychological (without deriving possible points of criticism from that), then it is to be recognized first as a strategy of ascribing the artist's own name in connection with the curator and the name Malevich in Internet search engines and in the memories of the »art/power machine«—with the effect that celebrity news could be used

as an integral component of the work and as an added value within the rankings of the art market.

Available as an ›embarrassing‹ traversal of the work is to expand and correct the suggestive scenario of curator and artist through further speculation about its origins: playing out possible other authorial influences on and of this work. Additionally, I would like to show how a chapter of the previously cited book by Slavoj Žižek can be read as an effect, which produces the Ostojić work *I'll Be Your Angel* as its cause entirely on its own; and vice-versa, how Ostojić's work can be read as the effect, which produces the corresponding Žižek text as its cause. The book *The Fragile Absolute* was published in 2000, prior to Ostojić's work at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001. However, *Black Square on White* was already included in Tanja Ostojić's work *Personal Space* in 1996, namely, in the photo series that she created with Saša Gajin in this context.¹² Žižek could also have already known the photo of Tanja Ostojić's black square of pubic hair on a white skin background during the writing of his book and could have made it a base for the chapter, without, in this assumed case, mentioning the artist. It furthermore appears possible to me that Ostojić could have carefully studied a chapter of the Žižek book in order to realize the new performative contextualization of her work *Black Square on White* as *I'll Be Your Angel* in Venice. My concern is to make an implicit, mutual reference structure tangible and effective: specifically the one between the performance *I'll Be Your Angel* and the third chapter in Žižek's *The Fragile Absolute*: It is the already mentioned ›Coke as *objet petit a*.«

Žižek describes in this chapter a short-circuiting between market and culture. Artworks of the modern era are charged with ever-stronger shock effects; postmodernism functions differently in this regard. The excess, the transgression, lost their shock effect and were immediately integrated into the art market without question, without resistance or waiting period. Here we notice a difference from Marina Gržinić's (still) ›modern‹ hope for the persistence of provocative art like *I'll Be Your Angel*. According to Žižek, concern today is no longer with elevating an object (especially something beautiful) in a Lacanian sense to the worthiness of a thing (the privileged *objet petit a*) (Lacan [1986] 1996: 138). Instead, a virtual void (parts of corpses, excrement), is set in the place of the thing. In art, however, the friction between the empty, sublime place for the thing and the respective object remains decisive. It is about a negative relationship; no object ever completely fills this place. This is most obvious with provocative art. Only in this way is the place holding, the creation of a void as a radical negation, still possible.

Žižek cites *one* work as the turning point to modernism, in that it is the first to concern the preservation and perceptibility of the minimal gap between the place and the object that occupies it: Kasimir Malevich's *Black*

Square on White from 1915 (fig. 4). The unprecedented effort and traversal of appearance (of beauty) undertaken by Malevich's *Black Square* is the preservation of the Place of the Thing. There was, however, according to Žižek, a condition present before this ›emptying of substance,‹ which enabled the very break from traditional to modern painting. This is Gustave Courbet's painting *L'origine du monde* from 1866 (fig. 5).

Let us now read Žižek as Tanja Ostojić perhaps read him: »Gustave Courbet's (in)famous ›L'origine du monde‹, the torso of a shamelessly exposed, headless, naked and aroused female body, focusing on her genitalia; this painting, which literally vanished for almost a hundred years, was finally and quite appropriately found among Lacan's belongings after his death. ... So the exposed female body is the impossible object which, precisely because it is unrepresentable, functions as the ultimate horizon of representation whose disclosure is forever postponed—in short, as the Lacanian incestuous Thing.« (Žižek 2000: 36)

For Žižek, the female genitalia in a picture that does not show the head of the subject is the ultimate, impossible object and with this the unrepresentable, which is always necessarily postponed in its disclosure: the Lacanian incestuous Thing. An overly enlarged proximity to the object-cause of desire is presented, a pleasure that threatens to topple with every representation through fantasy. This concerns the *objet petit a*, which we know in a different way as the familiar, normally not repulsive surplus pleasure or *mehrlust* of *Coca-Cola* discussed at the beginning of the text with reference to Žižek, which acts as a protective shield before an unmediated confrontation with the Thing.

In contrast to that, the encounter with Courbet's painting seems dangerous, the epitome of a horror trip (for Žižek): »What Courbet accomplishes here is the gesture of radical *desublimation*: he took the risk and simply went to the end by *directly depicting* what previous realistic art merely hinted at as its withdrawn point of reference—the outcome of this operation of course was ... the reversal of the sublime object into an abject, into an abhorrent, nauseating excremental piece of slime. ... The woman's body in *L'origine* retains its full erotic attraction, yet it becomes repulsive precisely on account of its excessive attraction.« (Žižek 2000: 37)

After first pausing for a moment, it seems probable that Žižek's repulsion for the »abhorrent, nauseating excremental piece of slime« in the appearance of the precious excellently painted female genitals is feigned. The argumentation proceeds, after all, as though the observer were standing directly before a disrobed woman rather than in front of a painting. The impression of the artificial, of a put-on, is quite unavoidable: as if Žižek had obviously put on too much here. Is he concerned with the impossibility of ›turning back‹ to the point of an incestuous fantasy through a (re-)experienced staging, attained through a slippery naturalism

in the depiction of his viewing experience? Perhaps Žižek also conceals something from us, namely, the habit of the last private owner of *L'origine*, Jacques Lacan, of unveiling the painting for visitors in his office, in order to carefully study the exact reactions of each guest (Savatier 2007: 173-199).

In this context, the claimed universal validity of Žižek's formulation seems an affront, as if his nausea caused by looking at the picture were the only possible reaction and the one consistent with Lacan's teachings. For even if all differentiations of gender identities and sexual orientations were based in the fantasy of the phallic mother, no uniform reaction can thus be derived from the view of the actual genital anatomy. Žižek's advertised fatal attraction of the female genitals is in no way universal. His nausea is required as dramatic depiction of a risky ambivalence between great attraction and the resulting threat of great repulsion. In that, it deals with the transition to postmodernism with its integration of the repulsive, or more generally: paranoiac and obscene visions. This transition, according to Žižek, was first enabled by *L'origine*, then *Black Square*.

Tanja Ostojić, on the other hand, could—hypothetically—operate Žižek's superimposing of Courbet's *L'origine du monde* and Malevich's *Black Square on White* as utmost provocation and with this interpretation recontextualize her photograph of pubic hair shaved into a square. According to Žižek's depiction, every imagined view of the *Black Square* would at the same time be a view of the image behind it, the desired and threatening picture of Courbet's *L'origine du monde*. Tanja Ostojić's photograph *Black Square on White* functions similarly, only with one further twist: In the compositional reference to the Suprematist abstraction of *Black Square*, the concrete female genitalia are evoked with a new evidence and abstraction. The view is lost in the details, which, recorded with a narrow depth of field, and wide-open aperture, consist mainly of pubic hair floating in a blur. The overexposure also causes one to guess more so than recognize the forms of the Venus mound and labia. One could almost say that here the female body functions as a curtain before the *Black Square* and a reversal of places has occurred. To this extent, the *Black Square* would be concealed as the larger obscenity behind the image of the female vulva. If *Black Square on White* were therefore the veiled inspiration, the origin of the chapter »Coke as *objet petit a*,« then the aversion by Žižek would not have taken place, as claimed, before Courbet's painting; instead, he would have turned away from the photographic composition by Tanja Ostojić of a white-powdered Venus mound and the *Black Square*. He would have concealed the innovative switching of places and at most made an art-historical comment referring to the basic idea of combining *L'origine* and *Black Square*. That is, he would have turned away from the object-cause

of his desire. Nonetheless, this would have been located elsewhere than where he claimed.

Nevertheless, or precisely because of this, in *I'll Be Your Angel*, Tanja Ostojić could, for her part, re-occupy Žižek's newly created or reconstructed image combining Courbet's and Malevich's paintings as the place of the abhorrent and strongly attractive *objet petit a*, and do so completely in the sense of a postmodern, Žižekian version. The photograph *Black Square on White* already appears to be a paradoxical translation of the referenced paintings in Žižek's text. But even more so, the performative application works with feigned, or at least culturally dulled, repulsion and the expected scandal from the deployment of all predictable projections onto the artist's live body. Ostojić understands and also corrects Žižek's representative trick, with which he describes the one-time scandal surrounding Courbet's picture as if it were his own experience, in that she updates it through her own person. Ostojić's application of Žižek at the Venice Biennale, which outdoes him epistemologically and performatively, is queer because she adds to it a void, a possibly never have taken place sexual offer to Harald Szeemann in her work, as an empty center. A void that does not fail to produce »glossy gossip,« something that is a thing and place (in the sense of Žižek) at the same time and that retains the minimal gap between both, especially through the disseminated doubt of the story behind *I'll Be Your Angel*: »Only the Biennale director, Mr. Harald Szeemann, will have the right to see this ›hidden Malevich‹... The structure of the piece is the process of mystery.«¹³ Thus the curator has the right to see this hidden Malevich. If by this the right to view the naked body of the artist is meant, then we do not know whether this right was ever exercised. If by this a view of the photograph *Black Square on White* is meant, then this would mean not only the curator has the right to see, but also all those interested, because this photograph was already made public in 1996 as an element in the photo series *Personal Space*.

4.

The Žižek argumentation quoted here can be presumed to be a reading effect that has been influenced by Tanja Ostojić's *Black Square on White* from *Personal Space*, and the Ostojić work *I'll Be Your Angel*, in part as a reading effect of the corresponding Žižek passages. Applicable for both constellations at the same time (regardless of these speculations about a secret cooperation or a hidden inspiration) is that they are each effects that have created their own cause (also in the other work) entirely on their own. This idea seems to me exemplarily developed in the ambivalent formulation of Ostojić's description of her work *I'll Be Your Angel*, which

excites biographical speculation about her possibly scandalous encounter with the curator and, at the same time, at second glance, makes it recognizable as going nowhere.

This is where I see Tanja Ostojčić's eradication of heteronormative gender roles and Žižekian universalism. This eradication is realized in a way that I would consider queer; it seems feasible only by traversing the naturalistic misunderstanding of an obscenity that existed between the artist and the curator and the trick of presenting a universally valid, eternal repulsion at the most attractive of all images. But does the incestuous fantasy, which Marina Gržinić's and Slavoj Žižek's interpretations explore, in fact have something to do with the thing in *I'll Be Your Angel* that caused my initial repulsion? Here, the queer answer is: maybe. What is certain is that, upon closer examination of Ostojčić's work, it called to mind my early painful experiences in love affairs. I found an uncanny similarity to scenes that former female partners had expected of me, in which they confronted me with their reported or displayed obscenities with high-ranking male partners. Marina Gržinić, by placing *I'll Be Your Angel* ›between the legs,‹ has exposed my memory track to an experience of excessive logic that is driven by a gap in the symbolization. This refers beyond personal gaps in memory. The implementation of the naturalized, obscene ›fathers‹ in place of me as a lover and in place of the name-of-the-father (the symbolic father function) was meant to dare an excessive jouissance, which nevertheless, seemed that much more clearly to be empty the more vehemently it sought my testimony and the wonder of a phallus that is not suspended by the Signified.¹⁴

As witness to a missed motherly penis, I am indeed just as suited as Marina Gržinić is to a missed possible Real¹⁵ if it is assumed that the subject owes its existence to a structural lack, a split, which always shows itself at the same points: feminine identity, authority, and sexual rapport. They exist in that they consist paradoxically of ›their‹ lack of existence, and thus, at the same time ›don't exist.‹¹⁶

Produced in place of this gap, this void, are surplus value or Queer Theory; female identity, authority, and sexual rapport, like the structurally unquenchable thirst for *Coca-Cola* or art. In this way, I think, a queer center can be perceived in the theory of Jacques Lacan. This also explains my motivation to draw a line through the title *Black Square on White*, and to add ›from *mehrlust* to nausea and back‹ in order to arrive at a different location of the authentic. The line through the title is a sign of that split that reveals the subject as the effect of a cause that it creates itself,¹⁷ and that's what I find queer.

Notes

1 »La *Mehrwert*, c'est la *Marxlust*, le plus-de-jour de Marx,« or »The *Mehrwert* is the *Marxlust*, the *plus-de-jour* of Marx.« See <http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Radiophonie.pdf> p. 21 (19 October 2008).

2 www.cokezero.com (29 June 2008).

3 Taken from the 2007 campaign in the US involving a series of videos. On the German website www.cokezero.de, »Echter Geschmack und zero Zucker—das Leben, wie es sein sollte« (True taste and zero sugar—life as it should be). See <http://www.cokezero.de/main.html> (28 June 2008).

4 »What are the possibilities for art and visual culture to be realized with a political-cultural *mehr queer* (queer surplus) in the sense of gender-critical knowledge production? And to what extent can ... a *Mehrwert queer* (surplus value) be formulated ›for queer, with queer, through queer?« Barbara Paul/Johanna Schaffer, poster text for the symposium: *mehr(wert) queer. Visuelle Kultur, Kunst und Gender-Politiken*, January 2008, Kunstuniversität Linz. See also in this book: Barbara Paul/Johanna Schaffer, Introduction: Queer as a Visual Political Practice.

5 Tanja Ostojić, *I'll Be Your Angel*, <http://www.kultur.at/howl/tanja/int/angel.htm> (22 January 2008).

6 The film program conceived by Brigitta Kuster and Karin Michalski, *queer-feminist film program on labor & sexuality*, section *melancholic work on heterosexuality*, shown in the context of the exhibition *Normal Love—precarious sex. precarious work*, curated by Renate Lorenz, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin 2007, showed the performance video *I'll Be Your Angel* by Tanja Ostojić, Paris, Venice, Novi Sad (Serbia) 2001/02, 15 min, http://www.normallove.de/htm/engl_film.htm (20 April 2008). See, additionally, Gržinić 2002, Gržinić 2003, Gržinić 2005.

7 I thank Renate Lorenz for her personal interpretation and report on the video *I'll Be Your Angel*. She described the *Angel/Escort's* somewhat too insistent nurturing, even to the point of embarrassing the person being escorted, as a queer happening.

8 »False information creates ›true events,« see »Kommunikationsguerilla,« in: *Wikipedia*. <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kommunikationsguerilla> (13 April 2008).

9 See »What I call ›giving ground relative to one's desire‹ is always accompanied in the destiny of the subject by some betrayal... .« (Lacan 1992: 321), »From an analytic point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is having given ground relative to one's desire.« (Lacan 1992: 319)

10 Cf. psychoanalyst Guy Massat's similar confusion between the real and the absolute when faced with computer-generated clitoris depictions; he describes these as the »absolute key to the universe.« (Reiche 2009)

11 I thank Anja Westerfrolke for this comment.

12 Tanja Ostojić refers to this in her accompanying text on *I'll Be Your Angel*, see <http://www.kultur.at/howl/tanja/int/angel.htm> (23 January 2008) and Ostojić/Gajin 1996: 63.

13 Tanja Ostojić, *I'll Be Your Angel*, <http://www.kultur.at/howl/tanja/int/angel.htm> (22 January 2008).

14 This incomplete section in the text about a biographic detail that hides in its interpretation deserves special attention. It cannot be skipped over.

15 See Marina Gržinić: »Between her legs, the real/impossible kernel of the art/power machine has received the only possible appearance in flesh and blood« in part 2 of this text.

16 See Verhaeghe 2000: 131-154, esp. 136: »... [T]hus the subject is always a divided subject ..., owing to a structural lack in the symbolic order. This division emerges at the same characteristic points: feminine identity, authority, and sexual rapport. This was summarized by Lacan ... in his three provocative statements: the Woman does not exist, the Other of the Other does not exist, the sexual rapport does not exist. This is a structural problem: While the three of them *do* exist in the Real, they do not find an appropriate answer in the Symbolic. As a result, the subject has to fall back on solutions in the Imaginary.«

17 See Zimmermann 2008. In her travel descriptions and photographs of Balkan women from the nineteenth and beginning twentieth centuries, Tanja Zimmerman shows the Balkans' »function ... as rhetoric repository and supplement for projections of Europe's own repressed otherness.« She does this by combining readings of Freud and Žižek with this historical image/text material and with artistic works, especially Tanja Ostojić's *Untitled* of 2004. These works thereby become readable as effects of veiling and unveiling and thus also as effects of transversing (crossing out).

Literature

- Coca-Cola zero, www.cokezero.de/main.html (22 April 2008).
- Gržinić, Marina (2002): »Malevich on Tanja Ostojic's mons veneris.« In: *Springerin. Hefte für Gegenwartskunst*, 8 (1). Online: www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=970&lang=en (22 April 2008).
- Gržinić, Marina (2003): »The Politics of Queer Curatorial Positions.« In: *Dérive. Zeitschrift für Stadtforschung*, No. 14, 34-35.
- Gržinić, Marina (2005): »Flexible Colonisations.« In: Geoff Cox/Joasia Krysa/Anyia Lewin (ed.), *Economising Culture: On The (Digital) Culture Industry*, New York: autonomedia. Online: www.data-browser.net/01/DB01/Grzinic.pdf. (23 January 2008).
- Lacan, Jacques (1970): »Radiophonie.« In: *Scilicet* 2/3, 55-99 and In: *Transcription des Séminaires de Lacan*, <http://gaogoa.free.fr/SeminaireS.htm>, click on »Scripta(t)s« in the new window, click on »Radiophonie«, download 1970_06_05.doc. (24 April 2008). English version translated by Jack W. Stone available at: <http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Radiophonie.pdf> (19 October 2008).
- Lacan, Jacques (1992 [1986]): *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*. Transl. Dennis Porter, New York, London: Norton (*Le séminaire. Livre VII. L'éthique de la psychanalyse, (1959-1960)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Seuil).
- Ostojic, Tanja, *I'll Be Your Angel*, www.kultur.at/howl/tanja/int/angel.htm (23 January 2008).
- Ostojic, Tanja/Gajin, Saša (1996): *Personal Space*, Gallery +12, Belgrade (exh. cat.).
- Kommunikationsguerrilla. In: *Wikipedia*, <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kommunikationsguerilla> (13 April 2008).
- Reiche, Claudia (2009): »Der reale kleine Penis des Weibes« in neuen Abbildungen. Die Klitoris im Verhältnis zur Medialisierung.« In: Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky/Christoph F.E. Holzhey/Anja Michaelen (eds.), *Der Einsatz des Lebens. Lebenswissen, Medialisierung, Geschlecht*, Berlin: b_books, 131-144.
- Savatie, Thierry (2007): *L'Origine du monde, histoire d'un tableau de Gustave Courbet*, Paris: Bartillat.
- Verhaeghe, Paul (2000): »The Collapse of the Function of the Father and Its Effect on Gender Roles.« In: Renata Salecl (ed.), *Sexuation*, SIC 3, Durham, London: Duke University Press, 131-154.
- Zimmermann, Tanja (2008): »Rituals of (Un)veiling: Orientalism and the Balkans.« In: Claudia Reiche/Andrea Sick (ed.), *do not exist: woman, europe, digital medium*, Bremen: thealit, 133-152.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1995): *Hegel mit Lacan*. Transl. Nikolaus G. Schneider. With a foreword by Peter Widmer. Zürich: RISS-Verlag (= *Riss-Extra* 2).

- Žižek, Slavoj (2000): *The Fragile Absolute. Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*, London, New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2000 [2000]): *Das fragile Absolute. Warum es sich lohnt das christliche Erbe zu verteidigen*, Transl. Nikolaus G. Schneider, Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2000b): »The Thing from Inner Space.« In: Renata Salecl (ed.), *Sexuation*, SIC 3, Durham, London: Duke University Press, 216-259.