

PHILOSOPHICAL (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF POSTMODERN IDENTITY THROUGH THE TEACHINGS OF LACAN, HEIDEGGER AND PLATO

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The present article deals with the application of Jacques Lacan's psycho-linguistic model of the chain of signification to the fragmented postmodern subject. Because of the inherent instability of the external as well as the internal environment of the subject, anxiety arises as a result of the fragmentation of the self, which, according to Lacan, has its basis in the interaction between the Symbolic order and the Real. Even though anxiety is a phenomenon that is impossible to evade, Lacan's teachings, coupled with their immersion in Martin Heidegger's understanding of the essence of technology, and the contemporary reinterpretation of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, show that the subject can teach himself to navigate the complexities of anxiety and, consequently, even learn to use it for his benefit.

Keywords: Jacques Lacan – Anxiety – Chain of Signification – Identity – Technology – Martin Heidegger – Plato

Introduction

We are teetering on the edge of an epoch which heralds the coming of radical change. Development in the field of technology is growing exponentially. However, this progress comes at great cost, which is represented by the limitations of human consciousness and its perception of consensus reality, i.e., the reality we all agree to share. While the one arm of humanity in the form of technological development is rapidly extending, the other one in the form of the constraints imposed upon us by our own imperfect symbolic system of language which allows us to understand the world is lagging behind more and more. Moreover, the unprecedented societal and cultural developments in the course of the past decade foreshadow the urgency for a new framework that would constitute an impetus which could point the way forward towards understanding our place in the world, which can be achieved through a novel way of looking at the phenomenon that has been

continuously and increasingly debated since the postmodern cultural shift in the 1950s and 1960s, namely the fragmentation and the gradual dissolution of individual identity.

We have grown accustomed to the fact that change happens gradually, and the larger the landscape of that change, the slower it comes to fruition. In the past, seismic societal shifts had mostly occurred over centuries or at least decades before their full force had been introduced world-wide. However, just over the past several years, the world has been witness to the COVID-19 pandemic which killed millions of people, decimated the world economy, and uprooted the sense of stability and normalcy in the lives of most of the world's population; the economic crisis which has produced massive inflation, which is currently fueled by another latently global conflict known as the Russo-Ukrainian War that has further destabilized the world order and has a profound impact on its security; and the rise of populism and extremism mainly in the Western world. All of these events, happening in very short succession, have created a perfect storm for a world-wide problem of existential proportions, which is, above all else, fueled by technology through the intentional and unintentional spread of disinformation, mainly via social media platforms. It is no wonder that, as individuals, human beings are losing their sense of normalcy which is being sequentially replaced by a profound feeling of uncertainty and, above all else, the most fundamental of moods, anxiety.

In order to obtain at least a semblance of stability in the contemporary world, to a large degree facilitated by technological, instead of human cognitive development, it is worthwhile to look back to various philosophical and psychoanalytic sources of early poststructuralist thought and attempt to recontextualize their premises in the wake of present-day challenges to the subject, i.e., the human being. This will constitute the core of the present article, as it attempts to link Jacques Lacan's postulation of the so-called chain of signification as a culmination of his teachings, Martin Heidegger's understanding of the essence of technology, and the contemporary reframing of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, all under the umbrella of the nature of language, subjectivity, and our agreed upon perception of reality.

The Lacanian Subject

The understanding of identity in a variety of structuralist scientific disciplines has been one of unity. The subject had been thought of as a self-contained complex matrix of principles, beliefs, ideals, values, social roles, etc. In contrast, with the onset of poststructuralist thought, this view of identity as a fixed and stable referent has been challenged and, instead, a profound and destabilizing shift has been introduced. The concept of identity which has been brought to the forefront of research has been one marked by fluidity, fragmentation, and contingency. The understanding of human subjectivity has no longer conformed to the post-war disillusionment with humanity

and, as a result, the self was no longer seen as a stable, unified, and coherent entity, but was rather thought of as a construct whose contours emanate from a variety of complex social, cultural, and historical factors, which, however, are themselves also prone to change. This is due to a paradigmatic shift in understanding the limitations of reason and science, which had, since the Enlightenment, remained more or less unchanged. Identity thus becomes an ephemeral concept whose fluidity and state of constant flux is dictated primarily by language itself.

One of the earliest poststructuralist thinkers to have devoted his life to the study of human identity was the well-known French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. Lacan's understanding of the human psyche resides chiefly in his radical reframing of the subject into the realm of language. In order to develop the argument central to this article, it is necessary to outline the basic assertions inherent to his psychoanalytical theory.

One of the most fundamental of Lacan's assertions is that the human "unconscious is structured like language" (Homer 2005, 33), which means that language is something that is made manifest in one's unconscious mind. As Lacan states in his lecture called "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,"

the mechanisms described by Freud as those of the primary process, by which the unconscious is governed, correspond exactly to the functions this school of linguistics [structuralist linguistics] believes determine the most radical axes of the effects of language, namely metaphor and metonymy – in other words, the effect of the substitution and combination of signifiers in the synchronic and diachronic dimensions, respectively, in which they appear in discourse. ...the structure of language is recognized in the unconscious... (2006, 677).

This central premise of Lacan was the starting point for a much greater exploration of the human unconscious in relation to the structure of language in general. Lacan postulated that if the unconscious mind has a structure akin to that of language, which he calls *the Symbolic* order (as understood by structuralist linguistics), that means that the only way for human beings to perceive objective reality is through symbols in the form of signifiers. Therefore, objective reality, the phenomenal world, or, as Lacan calls it, *the Real*, is something that is impossible to fully comprehend, and that is why, however unsuccessfully, human beings employ language. It is because

the real is the impossible. It is [impossible] to describe that which is lacking in the symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic (1977, 36).

The interplay between the Real and the Symbolic plays a pivotal role in the formation of identity; however, Lacan situates its birth in a pre-symbolic space he calls *the Imaginary*.

The Imaginary is the stage of development where a child that is not yet able to utilize language first constructs its sense of identity through its identification with the image in the mirror and its reflection through the actions and appearances of other people around it. This formed identity, however, is incomplete and chaotic and, as a consequence, is completely illusory, as it is merely a reflection based on a series of fragmented images and experiences, rather than a fully coherent and integrated sense of self.

This changes when the child enters into the Symbolic realm and starts using language which is profoundly tied to the Imaginary, but also the Real. It is the Symbolic that is ultimately responsible for the formation of genuine human identity, as it imposes strict limitations on the Imaginary, which results in the gradual integration of societal and cultural norms, thus co-forming a stable sense of identity in the child. The Imaginary never fully disappears and can interact not just with the Symbolic, but the Real as well.

Lacan postulated that the child, which is able to only access the Imaginary, above all else, desires what he called the *specular image*. This refers to the reflection of the image of oneself which is simultaneously oneself and *other (a)*; a state which persists until the subject reaches the Symbolic stage and uncouples the self from the object of desire (what Lacan calls *object petit a*), which splits into many. Even though *object petit a* sounds like a concrete object that one desires, it is not so. Lacan states that “object petit a is not a referent to a psychological object per se, but rather an analytic ‘object cause’” (1973, 168). That means there is a distinction between what Lacan calls the *phallus* (the specific object of desire) and *object petit a* which

represents an other that is simultaneously, intractably, incorporated with the psychic structure of the subject. It can be conceived of as a phenomenal valence between something the subject both lacks as an ideal I and is ultimately compelled by (Majumdar 2022, 513).

Object petit a is thus to be understood as a conceptual object inherent to all other objects of desire, and this distinction is crucial because *object petit a* is the gateway to the Real, and consequently, it leads us directly to the subject of this research, anxiety.

To illustrate, imagine the myriad of ways the development of technology has been progressing because human beings fundamentally desire to understand reality, and thus we create technology in order to extend our perceptual senses. However, practice shows us that we may never be able to pierce the fabric of what we call reality and fully understand its mechanics. This means that this very fantasy resides in the domain of the Imaginary, which is always subordinate to the Real, as is the Symbolic. In this case, the *object petit a* is not the human desire to fully comprehend the physical aspect of reality,

but our very realization that this feat is likely impossible. It is the impossibility of this achievement that stands for the object of desire *par excellence*, and it is this object of desire which constitutes the gateway towards our confrontation with the Real, which is inextricably linked to the impossible and, consequently, to the experience of anxiety. The subject's confrontation with the Real imposes limits on the Imaginary as well as the Symbolic. This constant internal struggle is what stands at the heart of Lacan's understanding of the formation of the subject's identity.

The Real Is the Impossible

The understanding of *object petit a* opens the door to the exploration of that which plagues each and every human being, albeit to a different degree, anxiety. It is commonly thought that the distinction between fear and anxiety resides in the presence or the absence of an object, respectively. According to Lacan, however, anxiety indeed arises from a different mechanism than fear but in spite of that, he claims that "anxiety is not without an object" (2007, 147) and postulates that

anxiety does have an object; in psychoanalytic thought this is not just any kind of object but an object *par excellence*. It is the most significant object as it marks the place of absence. It is that which drives the desire...it is that for which the subject seeks fulfillment through fantasies or objects of desire. *Object petit a* is fundamental if one is to think of a split, postmodern subject... (Zevnik 2017, 239).

Anxiety arises when the subject is confronted with *object petit a*, and, since the nature of this object is ephemeral and illusive, the subject finds himself in direct confrontation with the Real. The Real is the space where both the Imaginary and the Symbolic fail to provide the subject with a stable referent. That is because in the subject's adulthood the Symbolic is the dominant drive, as language mediates the relation between the subject and his subjective experience of the internal (emotions) and external (material) world (Cimatti, 2016). However, the Real, being the underlying, unrepresentable, and traumatic dimension of human existence, strips away any hope the subject feels in his desire for completeness and wholeness of his identity.

As Zevnik states, "the place from which anxiety emanates...is the gap" between language and desire (2017, 238). In other words, anxiety arises when the individual becomes aware of the gap between their symbolic representation of themselves and their desire for a complete and unified sense of self. Much like the Real perpetually maintains a looming presence over the subject, anxiety itself can never be fully eliminated. It must be understood and mitigated either through the analytic process or by understanding its mechanics on the part of the anxious subject well enough for him to integrate it into the

Symbolic realm of his experience. This can only be done by a deeper understanding of a crucial component of the symbolic processing of the *phallus* as well as *object petit a*, since “anxiety appears when lack is no longer lacking” (Lacan 2014, 41). By consciously realizing that the object of desire *par excellence* (*object petit a*) is unattainable, we start to confront the Real in the form of its impossibility which is the very source of anxiety in the first place.

Zevnik also notes that “the reaction to anxiety hints towards the existence of something more fundamental; it hints to the presence of a particular structure, which, through its split produces an anxious subject” (2017, 239). It is one of the premises of the article that Lacan had, in a very precise manner, outlined such a structure. It can be found in his seminar titled “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious” (1960), where Lacan introduces a scheme called the *chain of signification*.

Each time the subject wishes to express his object of desire, he goes through certain steps which allow him the possibility to verbalize this object in his unconscious mind. This process was graphically represented by Lacan via the scheme depicted below.

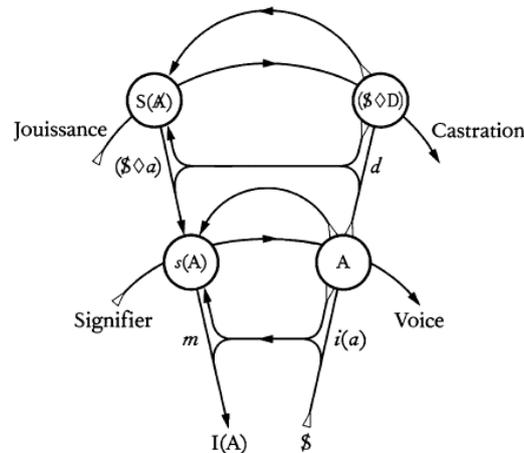


Figure 1. The upper and lower portions of the signifying chain (Lacan 2006, 692)

Lacan divided this scheme into two parts, namely the *lower* chain of signification and the *upper* chain of signification. The involvement of either just the lower or both parts of the chain of signification in the verbalization of the *phallus* is dictated by the complexity and degree of possibility of the desired object, however, the process is always initiated by the *signifier*. Subsequently, the signifier is formed into a *coherent statement* ($s(A)$) which is modulated by the *Other* (A – understood by Lacan as the locus of language and culture) into the physical interaction with the subject’s environment by the means of the *voice*.

This process represents the unobstructed path of the signifying chain by which the desired object is successfully articulated and realized. All of this happens through a complex set of relations that come into play, such as the *vector of the Ego* (m), the *Ego-ideal* ($I(A)$), the *barred subject* (\mathfrak{S}) – i.e., the subject split by language, and $i(a)$ (the specular image inherent to the Ego-ideal). In case the statement ($s(A)$) is verbalized incorrectly but does not contest the Other in any way, it is moved to the beginning of the signifying chain and the whole process is repeated until the statement is verbalized.

However, when the object of desire is structurally complicated and directly clashes with the *Other*, the articulation is postponed and moved into the upper chain of signification for reevaluation in the form of a *question* – “What do you want?” (Lacan, 2006, 690). When the desired object is prevented from being fully articulated, it is being moved, via the *vector of desire* (d) to the *treasure-trove of signifiers* relative to demand ($\mathfrak{S} \diamond D$) which constitutes the linguistic equipment of the *Other* that conveys meaning, thus also indicating the articulative complexity of the object of desire. After that, the question is *answered* ($S(A)$) thus reexamined and reformulated, through the vector of the *treasure-trove of signifiers* relative to *object petit a* ($\mathfrak{S} \diamond a$) again into a statement ($s(A)$). This process continues until one of two things happens. Either the desired object is articulated, and the desire is satisfied, or, in case the *Other* prevents it from being articulated because the desired object is, for example, socially unacceptable or simply impossible to satisfy, what Lacan calls *castration* ensues (Lacan, 2006, 690 – 691).

As Lacan states, “what is not a myth, although Freud formulated it just as early on as he formulated the Oedipus myth, is the castration complex” (2006, 695). Sigmund Freud was indeed the first one to propose castration; however, in terms of his psychoanalysis, castration appears when a child becomes aware of people’s genitalia (Freud 1954, 52), which leads to the emergence of the aforementioned well-known Oedipus complex. Freud thus ties castration primarily to its physical properties. Nevertheless, in the context of the psycho-linguistic model proposed by Lacan, the castration complex is tied to the chain of signification itself. It represents the complete and utter inability to articulate one’s *phallus* (the desired).

The entanglement within the chain of signification and its gradual move towards castration and, consequently, *anxiety*, is all underscored by the involvement of *jouissance*. *Jouissance*, also referred to by Lacan as the “beyond pleasure principle,” is an excess amount of pleasure which is in direct confrontation with the Other and subsequently, the Real. This confrontation inevitably results in anxiety because *jouissance* is inextricably tied to *object petit a* which is a part of the Real. Whenever *jouissance* takes hold of the chain of signification within one’s unconscious, it gradually moves the unarticulated signifier into the conscious mind because a suitable close of the signifying chain is not reached. This means that both *jouissance* and castration are

directly responsible for the subject's confrontation with the Real and the consequent emergence of anxiety.

For Lacan, the potential instability of the signifying chain is an important aspect of human experience, as it creates space for creativity and new forms of subjective experience. However, it can also lead to anxiety, not just in cases when the Other assumes a prohibitive function in the wake of the object of desire, but particularly when the subject's sense of self and the world is threatened by external forces the subject has no control over, such as the variety of crises listed in the introduction of this article. The most problematic aspect of the chain of signification is not its complexity, or its ties to the ephemeral nature of the Real; it is the seeming hopelessness and impossibility of managing anxiety on the part of the subject that is the actual conundrum here. However, it is one of the assumptions of this article that anxiety arising from the intricacies of the Lacanian subject can be controlled, though not completely eliminated, via the subject's profound understanding of the very process which has led the subject to the confrontation with the Real. By doing so, the subject can be given the tools to mitigate anxiety by recognizing its inevitability in the wake of events external to the subject's identity and individuality. However, if one is to fully comprehend the mechanism of the signifying chain, one must venture to the very edge of the Symbolic and try to approach the Real as much as possible. This is possible because Lacan's understanding of the Symbolic as was outlined in this section of the article implies that language can be used as a tool to approach the Real; in other words, that language is a form of technology. This can be achievable through exploring the very essence of language by immersing the Lacanian dialectic of the subject into an unlikely, yet strangely parallel source, namely Martin Heidegger's essay *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954).

Language as Technology

Let us now turn to Heidegger and his work *The Question Concerning Technology*, for this very essay may hold the key to better understanding the human role in the world we have created for ourselves, and which is currently in an expanding state of turmoil. An alternate reading of Heidegger's essay offers a unique approach to understanding language in relation to the way out of the fragmentation and the gradual dissolution of the Lacanian subject in the contemporary world. In order to do that, it is imperative to explore the essence of language through Heidegger's understanding of the essence of technology, because, as it will be argued throughout the course of this article, language, in all its complexity, *is technology par excellence*. Moreover, even though they chose very different approaches, both Lacan and Heidegger tried to encapsulate the ephemeral and elusive nature of the Real in their own respective ways.

If language is to be understood as technology, it has to neatly conform to Heidegger's notions put forth in his essay. As Heidegger states, "all ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through technology" (1977, 3). Technology is thus understood by Heidegger as a medium through which the subject navigates consensus reality with varying degrees of success. This also applies to language since it constitutes one of the most ancient forms of technology ever conceived by human beings. It is so because language, as well as technology in general are artificially created phenomena which both serve as extensions of the subject's perceptual capabilities. However, language "is not conceived as a simple instrument of mediation between individuals but rather as a fabric that organizes and structures social relations" (Alparone, La Rosa 2020, 6), along with our very perception of consensus reality. What Gurgel hints at is that in the same manner as technology has an essence, so does language, because behind the facade of the Symbolic lies an ephemeral structure that gives language its facticity. There is no escaping language (technology), because "everywhere we remain unfree and chained by [it], whether we passionately affirm or deny it" (Heidegger, 1977, 4). In the same way we cannot uncouple ourselves from technology, we are unable to free ourselves from the Symbolic, since it is the only medium through which we can interact with everything around us.

If we are to affirm that the language of the Lacanian subject is technology, it is worthwhile to explore this premise in terms of the ancient philosophical criteria known as the four causes, which Heidegger summarized as follows:

For centuries philosophy has taught that there are four causes: (1) *causa materialis*, the material, the matter out of which, for example, a silver chalice is made; (2) the *causa formalis*, the form, the shape into which the material enters; (3) the *causa finalis*, the end, for example, the sacrificial rite in relation to which the chalice required is determined as to its form and matter; (4) the *causa efficiens*, which brings about the effect that is the finished, actual chalice, in this instance, the silversmith (1977, 6).

If language can be thought of as technology, it must have the same essence, and thus the same properties, and here is where Lacan's understanding of the interaction between the Symbolic and the Real bears fruit. In this sense, the *causa materialis* would constitute the imagined desired object; the *causa finalis* would be represented by the signifier, as "the phallus [the desired] is the signifier" (Lacan 2006, 581); the *causa finalis* would be equivalent to the verbalized *phallus* via a coherent sentence structure; and the *causa efficiens* would be embodied by the Real, more specifically by *objet petit a* as the desired unattainable object. Even though Heidegger first attributes the silversmith (the equivalent of the subject in terms of Lacan) to be the *causa efficiens* according to the

ancient tradition, he is quick to point out that “*the silversmith is not a causa efficiens*” (1977, 8), an assertion which perfectly corresponds to Lacan’s understanding of language, which remains outside of the subject, yet the whole system of the Symbolic can only be realized through his agency.

Later on, in Heidegger’s essay he writes that “technology is a way of revealing...of truth” (1977, 12). This statement is seemingly in stark contrast to Lacan’s understanding of language which asserts that language

borne by the signifier...posit[s] itself as Truth. Thus Truth draws its guarantee from somewhere other than the Reality it concerns, it draws it from Speech [language]. Just as it is from Speech [language] that Truth receives the mark that instates it in a fictional structure (Lacan 2006, 684).

In contrast to Heidegger, who places truth in the real, Lacan localizes “Truth” in language itself. That is because he does not develop the argument further in a way in which it was developed by Heidegger. Thus, if language is truly to be thought of as technology, its essence must be the same as that of technology. Let us explore this argument further.

Just as in the case of language, the essence of technology fundamentally lies in the act of unconcealment, of revealing, understood here as ἀλήθεια, truth. However, Heidegger also notes that “man does not have control over unconcealment itself, in which at any given time the real shows itself or withdraws” (1977, 18). This is, again, remarkably synchronized with Lacan’s theory, which posits that the confrontation with the Real is often sudden and unexpected, which implies that the act of unconcealment takes place irrespective of the agency of the subject. Heidegger finds the source of this unconcealment in the act of Enframing, whose purpose is to challenge a human being to go forth in order to reveal the Real (1977, 20).

Heidegger’s understanding of the concept of Enframing is relevant here as it squares with Lacan’s own framework of the signifying chain whose pivotal constituent is the Other as the Symbolic realm which makes up the space of language. If language is to be a subset of technology, it has to correspond to the act of Enframing as well. Heidegger writes: “...what [is] Enframing itself actually? It is nothing technological, nothing on the order of a machine. It is the way in which the [R]eal reveals itself as standing-reserve” (1977, 23).

Is it not the Other that constitutes the space for the treasure-trove of signifiers in place of Heidegger’s standing-reserve? Heidegger understands the complexity of the act of Enframing also as “the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in a position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve” (1977, 24). In the subject’s attempt to articulate the desired, one must necessarily reach into the treasure-trove of signifiers and align them coherently in order

for him to successfully construct this articulation in the same manner as humans must reach into the standing-reserve in order to create any form of technology. The most problematic aspect of language understood as technology is that unlike other forms of technology, language is no longer being developed by human beings at a pace that would be sufficient enough to be able to encompass the totality of our understanding of the Real, or at the very least to keep pace with the development of forms of technology other than language itself. However, Heidegger also asserts that

man...exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression come[s] to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself (1977, 27).

Heidegger's cry for man's humility with respect to the vastness and complexity of the cosmos presented through this statement is also a turning point where our purely materialistic view of the universe must come into question, and, surprisingly, he also seems find a way out of this conundrum.

Later in the essay he states: "Enframing [the Other] blocks the shining-forth and holding sway of truth [the Real]" (1977, 28). Thus, the human tendency of clinging to the Symbolic realm where, in the zeal to symbolically encapsulate the Real (which is impossible), the subject is attempting to constantly form and reform signifying chains without realizing the fact that it is this very obsession which precludes the subject from truly confronting the Real and experiencing the anxiety and *jouissance* associated with it. Only by the subject's acceptance of the fact that it is his consistent attempt at verbalizing the *phallus* (the desired) which precludes him from getting closer to the Real, can he overcome the constant futile struggle against the Real. For the *phallus*, the desired, only represents a mere mirage of the *object petit a* which can never be fully revealed, nor understood. And herein lies the danger of the Symbolic as well as technology, but also, in Heidegger's words, its saving power (1977, 29). Merely using it without understanding and truly accepting its power and potential only causes the subject to go down an ever-deepening spiral of anxiety which is meaningless unless the subject is capable of accepting it and integrating it into the Symbolic. Only by accepting and integrating the inevitability of the anxiety associated with the confrontation with the Real can the subject pass this understating into contentment and live a truly fulfilled and defragmented life. Perhaps this is the path that needs to be put forward in order for the subject to be content with anxiety that is being determined by the impossibility of the Real. However, this is still not the desired outcome.

The confrontation with the Real necessarily leads to anxiety as a deep and profound aspect of our fragmented individuality. While anxiety is deeply unpleasant, when consciously reframed by the subject, it can have remedial qualities which, paradoxically ease the burden and may lead to human cognitive development and deeper understanding of consensus reality. The remedial function of anxiety lies in the fact that it forces us to confront our consensus reality, borne out of the Symbolic order, with the Real. For example, this action shows the subject that it facilitates “the realization that a complete elimination of fear or risk is a social fantasy, a narrative, which provides reassurance and, in turn, creates and maintains social cohesion and order” (Zevnik 2017, 237). That is possible because anxiety “fixates the existence of the subject in the present moment, while dismantling any dreams or illusions of a different/better future” (Zevnik 2017, 237). All of this implies that the confrontation between the subject and the Real, even though deeply unpleasant, can be managed and even turned into a benefit with respect to the development of the subject. Even though, so far, the immersion of Lacan’s psycho-linguistic theory in Heidegger’s philosophy concerning technology has been fruitful in revealing *what* needs to be done in order to ease anxiety, i.e., for the subject to *willingly* confront the Real without doing everything in his power to turn away, what remains to be explored is *how* to do this.

The Real, the Symbolic, and Plato’s Cave

In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger also offers a tantalizing glimpse into the manner in which the Real can be confronted: “Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiance appearing also was called *techné*” (1977, 34). Heidegger calls τέχνη art, and art teaches us to get in touch with our humanity. Feeling pleasure or anxiety can mean getting in touch with our humanity also. On the other hand, merely using technology without understanding its essence (its truth, its *object petit a*) takes humanity away from us. In other words, trying to frame everything into the Symbolic order robs us of humanity.

The ancient term τέχνη has a dual meaning. It refers not only to *art* but to a *craft* as well, a term which brings to mind the famous Plato’s Allegory of the Cave from his *Republic* (514a – 520a). Plato’s Allegory has served as an allusion for a great many academics in various fields of study, from philosophy to theoretical physics. However, it is interesting to note that Plato’s work is seldom discussed in the context of the psycho-linguistic concept of identity proposed by Jacques Lacan, which is a shame, since the Allegory of the Cave harbors the answer to the question of *how* the subject can assume a position in which he will be comfortable with his encounter with the Real.

Plato’s Allegory features a group of people chained to the wall of a cave, whereby they are only able to perceive the shadows projected unto a wall in front of them. The

only thing they can do is recognize “the various shadows passing by” or decipher “their patterns, their order, and the relationships among them” (2016, 6), an act that sounds very similar to the subject’s constraints imposed upon him by the Symbolic order. Engaging in the signifying chain through which the subject is constantly attempting to form and reform statements based on pattern recognition, ordering, and the relationships among them constitutes the hallmark of language, which draws its contents from the Symbolic order, which, in turn, attempts to reflect the Real but never succeeds, thus assuming the position of a mere substitute for the Real. When one of the chained individuals is released and led outside of the cave, Plato states:

Now, if he was forced to look directly at the firelight, wouldn’t his eyes be pained? Wouldn’t he turn away and run back to those things which he normally perceived and understand them as more defined and clearer than the things now being brought to his attention? (2016, 4)

In Lacanian terms, the subject’s confrontation with the Real results either in pain emanating from experiencing anxiety or from *jouissance*, which also results in pain derived from too much pleasure. In both cases, the most basic desire of the subject is to avoid such clashes with the Real. Plato, however, offers a different solution to this conundrum, when he writes:

What our message now signifies is that the ability and means of learning is already present in the soul. As the eye could not turn from darkness to light unless the whole body moved, so it is that the mind can only turn around from the world of becoming to that of Being by a movement of the whole soul. The soul must learn, by degrees, to endure the contemplation of Being and the luminous realms (2016, 10).

This means that only by *gradually* and *repeatedly* coming into contact with the Real, via the profoundly discomfiting experience of anxiety, can the subject sequentially ease the suffering caused by the action. This constitutes the answer to the illusive question, posed by Lacan and Heidegger in their own individual ways, concerning the manner in which the subject is to approach the Real without having to endure the notorious fragmentation and self-split so reminiscent of the Lacanian subject. This is the blueprint to the τέχνη – *craft* that Plato alludes to at the very end of this portion of the dialogue. For a *craft* is something that must be learned through frequent engagement and practice, and the same goes for the act of consciously approaching the Real and successfully mitigating the anxiety that the subject invariably experiences when confronted by it. However, Plato also issues a warning, because approaching the Real

by the means of the Symbolic is inherently unstable: “Now, would it be at all surprising for one who has been engaged in the contemplation of holy things, when he ventures into ways of degenerate humanity, to appear ridiculous in his actions” (2016, 9)?

This line of thinking is a double-edged sword though, because even though Plato praises this form of enlightenment, it possesses its drawbacks. That is because nowadays, all sorts of people believe they are in possession of knowledge that is true and think themselves enlightened. However, many of them have merely fallen victim to their Symbolic order simply substituting the Real, resulting in disinformation fueled by the technological development in the IT sector. Thus, if one is to choose the path which is laid out in this article, one must maintain distance, caution, curiosity, discipline, and a contemplative spirit if one is not to fall into a feeling of superiority in the wake of the knowledge of higher truths, since such a knowledge can be false. Plato, however, emphasizes that if such a path is undertaken, it must be steadied by the Idea of the Good, whose counterpart in our consensus reality is understood as the movement of the spirit which does no harm to either the self or the other.

Conclusion

In today’s fast-paced and rapidly changing world, the subject is being continually immersed in uncertainty and the persistent feeling of anxiety. In general, the problem with anxiety is that the subject is normally incapable of its management without the use of specialized treatment. However, the results of this article suggest that working with, instead of against, anxiety may be possible by understanding the mechanics behind this phenomenon. The act of approaching, understanding and mitigating the emergence and persistence of anxiety has been explored in depth through the psychoanalytical teachings of Jacques Lacan, particularly his psycho-linguistic model of the chain of signification, which represents the culmination of his teachings, as it visually shows the mechanics of the subject’s articulation of the desired object as well as a way in which anxiety emerges through the Symbolic recesses of the subject. Lacan’s teachings show that anxiety is a phenomenon that is the result of the unwanted, yet inevitable confrontation between two related systems, the Symbolic and the Real. This tension and perpetual struggle are fully made manifest in the image of the contemporary man whose identity is dissolving and being constantly fragmented. As this research has shown, the possibility of a reintegration of the fragmented self might be feasible through the subject’s conscious understanding of the mechanics of the emergence of anxiety, which, as the immersion of Lacan’s teachings in the core premises of Heidegger’s essay *The Question Concerning Technology* and the contemporary reinterpretation of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, has shown, also possesses a remedial function. This assertion, however, must be the focus of a separate study since the aim of this article was to explain the mechanism

of action by which anxiety emerges and persists in the subject. This mechanism of action can be approached by gradually exposing the subject to the Lacanian Real that constitutes the core instigator of anxiety. This approach, naturally, is not meant as a substitute for the psychoanalytic therapeutic process; however, it may present a way to make this process more effective in understanding and mitigating the negative effects of anxiety on the subject.

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