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Andrea Perunović

## SUBJECT AND (POST)TRUTH BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

An Interview with Alenka Zupančič<sup>1</sup>

How do we perceive the notion of subject today, and how the notion of truth? In the second half of the last century, it seemed that these two concepts have disappeared from the radar of theory, being marked as a residue of a sclerosed metaphysical tradition by some currents of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Nevertheless, it seems that the contemporary context calls for their thorough questioning. What can be said about these canonical philosophical terms, without making mere repetitions or setting foundations for one of the numerous new ontologies? In which way we can think of contemporary transformations of subjectivity in the “era of post-truth”, when lie and truth, trust and mistrust, crises and security are intervoven in some kind of a hegelian bad infinity. Which adequate critical tools for analysing are to be found in philosophy, and which ones in psychoanalysis? When those are complementary, and when not? What can we still learn on subject and truth from Kant or Nietzsche, what from Freud and Lacan? Which insights from these authors have the potential to grasp the new normativity of our world?

Alenka Zupančič is a renowned Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst, professor and researcher at the Institute for Philosophy at the University of Nova Gorica and also a prominent figure of the psychoanalytic school of Ljubljana. Zupančič writes and thinks on the axis of psychoanalytic theory and continental philosophy, working on the concepts such as real, ontology, unconscious, hysteria, negation, lie, comedy, sexuality amongst others. Some of her books are entitled *Ethics of Real: Kant and Lacan*; *(The odd one in: On Comedy; The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two* and the last one published: *What is Sex?*

**Perunović:** One of the possible points of departure for our conversation that will gravitate around the notions of subjectivity and truth is the current context

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<sup>1</sup> This interview is a slightly edited transcription of the second episode of *Zvuk misli* (*Sound of Thoughts*), podcast of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory. The original transcript can be found here: <https://podcast.rs/subject-and-posttruth-psychoanalysis-and-philosophy/>

that we're all living in. In that sense, how do you see the frequently used and often abused notion of "post-truth"? Is there anything *new* there or we're still dealing, in a fashionable manner maybe, with the same old problems that were always amongst us?

**Zupančič:** I would say that it is certainly true that we are living or witnessing a certain shift, a sudden real discursive shift that this term also tries to relate to. So perhaps the important thing is to determine what exactly is going on here, what is this shift that can be then prized or criticised, because some say that it is pretty nice that we live in post-truth, that we have finally liberated ourselves from this tyranny of truth, and so on. So I would say perhaps that, regarding the shift that is happening, that one often points the finger, and that is kept encapsulated with the term post-truth, at what appears for instance in our contemporary society as a kind of vulgar generalised realisation of postmodernism, you know, the decline of objective truth as an epistemological category, as value and so on. And then one goes on to attribute the fact that it is no longer possible to even distinguish truth; one has the tendency of attributing this into influence of postmodern theory, or modern theory or critical theory, or to this kind of movement of deconstruction of the notion of the original and to kind of general promotion of nominalism.

But I think what one needs to be careful about here, is that this enthusiasm of rediscovered realism, we see all kinds of realisms popping out, that this enthusiasm of newly discovered realism, sometimes tends to forget a very realistic fact that it is often quite objectively hard to distinguish truth from fiction. Counterfeit, I don't know, all kinds of fakes, are in fact getting better and better. I mean, obviously, technology has produced some astonishing, disturbing things in this regard. But also, our social relations in late capitalism, are excessively, I would say, fictionalised, in order for the real of the capital, for the reality of the capital, to be able to follow its course. So we don't have fiction on one hand and the real or reality on the other, they are really indistinct. It would seem that this kind of suppose postmodern questioning or undermining of the original, has kind of long since moved to reality itself, that it's not simply a question of theory of perspective, but of a certain way in which our reality is quite, I would say, objectively structured.

**Perunović:** In that vein, I would like to mention an author that that you cherish, and that you have been working on a lot during your career, and it is Nietzsche. So, is there any possible relation between the so called post-truth phenomenon and the infamous Nietzsche's dictum, which affirms that there is no truth, but only interpretations; the Nietzschean idea of truth as nuance?

**Zupančič:** Nietzsche and the question of truth is really an interesting and complex question. So I'm not even sure if we have the time and opportunity today to really dig into it in some detail. But concerning this dictum that you mentioned, I have to say that I'm not even sure if it does really describe the

predominant social climate today. Namely, just let's think about what is on the rise for instance, take the example of conspiracy theories which are not only today on the rise, but they also seem to be really forcefully entering the public space, the mainstream, even official politics. A clear example is the relation between QAnon and Donald Trump and even mainstream Republican politics. So I think that, while on the one hand, and you will see why I mentioned conspiracy theory, we can say that this supposedly democratic relativization, levelling of different claims with scientific claims is appearing as just one of many language games; this is today something that appears as a problem, as well the fact that there is no public as a general common platform, that would play the role of the big Other. Here I get to the point about what I wanted to say about conspiracy theories. What is really interesting is that followers of conspiracy theories very much believe in truth. And they take the category of truth very seriously. So they're just convinced that the truth is different from the official one. So the paradigmatic theories don't claim that there many interpretations and we just have to pick one or the other, but there is rather a kind of an almost fanatic truth, the belief in truth. So, my point was simply to say that in a different perspective, perhaps the relativization of truth that we are witnessing today, that's not exactly presented itself as a kind of playful, easy-going, post-modern dancing around, but often has precisely this kind of fanatic belief as its important ingredient.

**Perunović:** We will get to the topic belief, of trust and mistrust a bit later on, but I don't want to waste the opportunity to ask you about what do you think of the notions of lie and lying, because you were writing extensively on that subject, then you're, you're insisting notably on the fact that truth and lie, are not symmetrical. So can you please say a few words about that? And do you see the emancipatory potential in lie maybe, or what do you read from its state today? What is lie today?

**Zupančić:** When I was writing about this, I did take my starting point in this, finally, very simple notion of Lacan, that truth and lie are not symmetrical, because truth is kind of split or divided between two levels, and it is an inherent condition of speech in this sense, truth is more fundamental than lie, not in some moral sense, or in some kind of theological sense, but simply because we don't get to say anything without at the same time positing that it is true. You know, the classic example: even if I say, I'm lying, I am saying, it is true that I am lying. So, when I'm speaking, there is this dimension of truth, that is not the opposite of falsehood, but that is a kind of grounding both the truth as exactitude and lying. So, but then lying also has a very interesting dialectics of its own, because I would say that a lot of what we call lying springs, or this what one calls the culture of lying, springs from an internal difficulty, in contradiction of truth. There is this famous saying by Lacan: the truth is not whole, that you cannot say it all. And there is something that you always say too much or not enough, or there is something that disappears there. So you have all these interesting phenomena,

which are like, you can lie with truth or you can tell truth by means of a lie, which make the landscape much more interesting. But for me, this doesn't make it relative. I'm not saying it's not important whether we tell the truth or lie and so on. Just saying that we have to be careful to detect, for instance, also the instances where you can very efficiently lie by just enumerating facts, certain facts, of course, not all of them, so that it makes sense to say although everything that you said just now is true, factually true. Nevertheless, your whole speech is a lie or is there to kind of promote a certain way of social life and the other way around, you can also do the opposite and use, not like, intentionally, but nevertheless, use the lie and through lying you say a certain truth.

So I think this is interesting also today, because it's not only about facts as much as I am for this kind of enlightenment idea that there is also a truth, a scientific truth that is extremely important”.

**Perunović:** We will see maybe if we are moving to that idea of truth via our paranoiac era, because when Lacan is speaking about paranoia he's saying, in one of his seminars, that paranoia is just one step before the science. But we're far away from that right now, I think. Let's focus now our attention please on the notion of subject. While keeping in mind, of course, the context that we have traced right now, and firstly, I will propose to you to grasp it from the psychoanalytic point of view. It seems that in psychoanalytic theory, the Freudian one above all, the *topos* of censorship, the one that separates the conscious from the unconscious, and where the repression happens, is the pivotal place around which the subject is organised.

In one of your interviews, you are mapping the affect, which is the specific translation and the conscious counterpart of the unconscious drive, as a socially valorised category nowadays. In that vein, do you think that censorship and the whole mechanism of repression has changed, has loosened up in some perverse way? Or has it become more porous? Or to put this differently, has the role of censorship and repression in subjectivity changed from the times when, for example, Freud or Lacan even used to write about it?

**Zupančič:** To some extent, it definitely did change. Also, I think we should be careful to see precisely what is going on here, if it's just kind of censorship becoming less severe? Or is it that that the censorship is structured, its modality is structured in a different way, which precisely includes some way of acknowledging what we know, as a way of perpetuating the repression, the *Verdrängung*, the unconscious? And I think I, okay, I don't know, I can go there directly, or you want me first to answer this more general question about the lacanian subject? What is the lacanian subject, or we go first to interrogate a little bit what are the specific modalities of repression today?

**Perunović:** Yes, let's start from the subject, if that's fine with you, that would be important for understanding repression as kind of mechanism that is inherent to the subject. So please, yes, we can start with the subject.

**Zupančič:** I think what is really interesting and quite unique in lacanian theory, and this is why I like it so much, is that differently from most of these other post-structuralist theories and so on, which, more or less, I'm simplifying a little bit, hold that the subject is simply an effect of the structure, that is to say, of some fundamentally non subjective process. As such, we can more or less do without it. Without this notion. In Lacan, there is a big difference. It's not simply that the subject is the effect of the structure, it is actually the name of the lack or contradiction or gap in this structure. So the idea is quite different. And this means that subject is not exactly the same thing as subjectivation, as this kind of richness of life experiences, as the way in which we subjectify certain things. So, it is also politically an important point that the subject corresponds to a gap in the symbolic structure, or, to put it this way: that it points to the fact that the symbolic or discursive structure is not simply consistent, or if it were consistent at all, then it wouldn't even produce, it wouldn't need the notion of the subject. But this is not how Lacan poses it. Then this notion of the subject as basically a lack in the Other, also introduces a kind of more complex landscape concerning the question of repression, *Verdrängung* the repression in this Freudian sense of *Verdrängung*, a kind of redoubling, namely: if subject is this ontological lack or inconsistency of the symbolic other, it is not only the one who represses certain things, but it also a structuring the place where the repression happens, and also the place where the symptoms of this repression, surface or emerge. So, I think Freud saw this or he intuited this as he doesn't have an explicit theory about it as Lacan does, but he intuited this, and this is why I think he introduced this term of *Urverdrängung*, the primary repression, which is the idea that the repression doesn't start with the first thing you repress, but it is built in the unconscious, built in as a negativity in the very symbolic structure. So it's not directly personal. One more important point that I think relates to this is this is why for instance, Lacan can say that, formations such as society in general, or family or this or that institutions, these are not simply formations that induce repression – *Verdrängung* – that they demand repression, as in this kind of classical frommian understanding, but are actually creations built on repression and with repression, with *Verdrängung*, so they are struggling themselves with an inherent gap that determines an inherent impossibility. And I think this is very important. So, it is important also to keep that in mind when we move then to your second part of your question, which is, what has changed lately in this way in which we repress, with which distractors we try to keep the antagonism or their inherent possibility repressed or out of sight, so to say.

Is the censorship diminishing? Freud already introduced two ways in which repression is being sustained by means of us fully consciously declaring the very thing that is repressed. You know, one well known example is from *Verneinung* paper, when the analysant says without being asked: oh, I had this dream, there was this person in it, I don't know who this person was, but it surely was not my mother. This is the way you pronounce it, you say "mother", it is there in front of your eyes, but it is a way of precisely not seeing what you say. But the

other way, which is even more relevant, I guess, for our present social way repression functions, is the case of fetishist disavowal, you know this is famous utterance “I know very well, but...”?

**Perunović:** Can you say a few words about the concept of fetishist disavowal, please? It seems really important...

**Zupančić:** I think it's really important, and it has this kind of perverse distortion in it, which I think is extremely important for the way our relationship to what is going on functions, how our unconscious can be sustained. The basic structure of fetishist disavowal can be recognized in the saying: “I know very well that this is so, but somehow I keep believing that it is not so, or I believe the opposite”. And I would really say that this is a predominant mode of how today, very often, huge or quite problematic forms of repression are being sustained by us, or sometimes by some leaders who are shamefully displaying and blatantly stating what is there, nothing follows from there. Very often we hear this formula, “but we all know what is going on”. It seems that as if this knowledge itself was a way of protecting us from acknowledging the consequences of this knowledge. So here, this perhaps becomes a little bit more complicated, but I will try to explain how I think of what is happening here.

So, we have a kind of a structure of the fetishist disavowal, we'll just say, *bien mais quand même*. But there is a further twist in it. So, it is no longer simply, “I know very well, that there is no X, but I keep believing there is.” But actually, it is now as if that I know very well that there is no X, and this is precisely why I can go on believing in it. As if this knowledge were enough and justified, as if it dropped this knowledge of all consequences, because it is enough that we know. So, while in the classic fetishist constellation, this belief, the unconscious belief, is delegated to the fetish. For instance, I know very well (this is the Freudian example) that women don't have a penis, but I do not secretly believe that they nevertheless do – it is the fetish that believes this in my step, it is the shoe, whatever it is, the belief is delegated to the fetish. And my point would be that what is going on today is that the knowledge itself functions also as this kind of fetish. This kind of precipitated acknowledge the awareness of how things really stand we know realistically how they are, makes it possible for us to ignore what we know. So, it is not “I know very well, but I nevertheless continue to believe the opposite”, but rather as I said, “I know very well and this is why I can go on ignoring it”, or it can stay in this way. I think it is really kind of blatant if you look at how very often something that is suddenly revealed and it looks like a total scandal is then immediately transformed into this kind of general consensus “oh, but we knew this all along”.

And this is quite interesting for me. This is for me the fetishization of knowledge not in the sense that knowledge is so important, in this common sense of fetishization, but precisely in the Freudian sense: knowledge itself is this fetish, this object, this shoe that takes on the suppressed or *verdräng*-belief that it is actually not true. So, this is interesting, because it looks that it is



it is not simply that everything is out in the open – this would be my point regarding your question – that now the censorship has diminished, but then directed the form of censorship and of keeping things unconscious, profoundly unconscious, has changed. The fact that they're [suppressed signifiers] right there in front of our eyes is not necessarily an indicator that the censorship is no longer there, it just means that it uses another means of being effective. So, I think there is still a lot of repression and censorship going on, but that it has found this kind of perfidious, perverse form that is very connected to fetishist disavowal.

**Perunović:** Yes, you were mentioning, when bringing closer to us this conceptual apparatus, words like belief and trust, and the perfidious way in which all of this functions. How do you see the notions of trust and belief? Do this change in modalities of repression signify the final takeover of trust, actually, it's predominance in dictating what is real?

**Zupančić:** In what I was just saying, this kind of combination of knowledge: “we know all about it, we are nobodies dupes, we are no fools” seems to be a very strong motivation in this knowledge functioning as a fetish, here in this precise, freudian sense. But I think what is interesting, precisely in this configuration, is also the kind of coincidence, I would even say, of trust and mistrust. There is a very interesting way in which the mistrust is the very form of trust.

**Perunović:** Mistrust as trust with the negation in front of it, so even more richer trust in some sense. It's not a sublated trust, if you want, it is its opposite, its identical opposite.

**Zupančić:** Precisely. And here again, if we return to the to the example that I suggested earlier, a very good example of this is precisely again conspiracy theories, you know, where you have this kind of clear coincidence of absolute mistrust, or paranoid mistrust towards all kinds of things, particularly in official versions of events, authorities, and so on; but at the same time, also this incredible trust or belief in whatever, not only in the theory that they are proposing. This combination of trust and mistrust, or coincidence of trust and mistrust, is a part of the very form of what we could call the conspiracy theory's big Other (if you use this kind of, Lacanian concept). Because conspiracy theories have a very interesting correlation to the agency that Lacan calls the big Other. Namely, on the one hand, they believe, they are convinced that the big Other actually very much exists, but differently from how Lacan says it exists. They believe that it exists in this sense that they believe that there is an agency, which is in itself absolutely consistent, which operates and purposefully, pulls all the strings, and there is no lack or gap in this agency, it is absolutely consistent. It is in this sense that they believe that the big Other exists undivided. This is the level of certainty here. But the same time, they can only trust this big Other, even if they cast it as fundamentally and deliberately deceiving.

So, this consistency of the big Other is very interesting. It is persistent because it can only be as such a big Other, it can only be a big Deceiver with capital D, a big fraud, a big cheat. You see how that there is a very interesting interplay, again, of trust and mistrust in how the very mistrust, the radicality of mistrust, is founded in this absolute trust that they really know what they're doing, and that they have everything under control, and they're pulling all the strings. So I think this is quite interesting as a way in which many things today work and we sometimes think that there is this radical scepticism, this radical criticism, but if you look at these structures more closely, you see how the scepticism is not at all very radical, not radical enough, that it actually is based on some kind of certainty which sustains it.

**Perunović:** That rises many topics that I would like to ask you about, but let's stay on the notion of mistrust – *Unglauben* – which is so important for Freud and Lacan. Of course, in relation to denial, which we were mentioning already, but also in the context of the global rise of right wing “populist” ideologies, that seem all to rely heavily on the conspiracy theories and “popular” mistrust. So, on the one hand, is denial, *Verneinung*, the new, predominant type of repression? And on the other, isn't trust definitely replaced by mistrust, as a constitutive feature of reactionary subjectivity? And finally, if we used to live in neurotic times, are we living now in a deeply paranoid era?

**Zupančić:** I mean, one thing that one perhaps needs to say, nevertheless, is that this mistrust, I wouldn't simply define it as a kind of necessarily reactionary or pathological formation, or it can be defined as pathological only in the sense, or to the extent, to which it also points to some pathology of the way our society functions today. I mean, this is not because of these people are being paranoid, but because there is something in the very structuring of the social order that not only uses, but we could perhaps even say, justifies a certain paranoid attitude. So it is not simply that: okay, they are paranoid, they're crazy... There is a certain truth, if we return to what we were talking about the relationship to truth and lying, that makes that we could say: there is a certain high or more general truth involved in this very paranoid reaction of the masses. So, something points to a real problem in the social bond and in the way it is structured these days. And I'm not only talking about these kind of conditions, of everything, including work conditions, and so on, becoming more and more precarious, of this instability of this or that, or all these things and the way in which we are precisely trained, ideologically trained not to rely too much on anything or anybody, because then we are not flexible enough to satisfy whatever we're trying. So there is certainly a lot going on. This is also why I don't think that we should also simply dismiss this movement, including the most reactionary one, as wrong. Of course, they are wrong. They are wrong in most of what they're saying – but there is a certain truth that pertains to the reasons of why and how they emerged in this particular pointing in time in history and social relations. So, this would be definitely something that we do

that we have to bear in mind. This is not a justification for the reactionary subject, it just happens that we need to keep the two levels of truth and of the lie or falsehood in front of our eyes, in order not to become prey to quickly of some kind of moralising discourse of outrage and condemnation, you know, because there are certain reasons for this, which are not direct technological reasons, but are related to certain social structuring.

**Perunović:** Maybe we should proceed now to one of your early books, entitled *Ethics of Real: Kant and Lacan*. One of the first chapters in that book is entitled “The Subject of Freedom”. In this text you are developing a very complex argument, that links the Kant’s notion of subject to the one that was developed in Lacan. And the central position in this text is take by Freud’s dictum, that goes like this: “Man is not only much more unfree than he believes, but also much freer than he knows.” What are, in your opinion, the emancipatory features of Kant’s, but also, on the other side Lacan’s, conceptions of subjectivity in the context that we were mentioning?

**Zupančič:** This is an extremely important question today, precisely because it tackles this question of freedom and it tries to tackle it in a way that is very different from all this talk about freedom that is a kind of ideological foot of the functioning of capitalism, neoliberalism, and so on, which is the freedom of choice, etc. I mean, the word freedom has been so much used, that it no longer has any emancipatory link to it at all. It almost seems that it is the very signifier of oppression: you do all kinds of things in the name of freedom, democracy or whatever. So, it is very, very important, I guess, to also philosophically try to pin out what are we talking about when we’re talking about freedom. Is this simply some kind of subjective freedom or so on. So, this is why the Kantian approach, in its very radicality, was interesting, because, on the one hand, it absolutely includes this kind of belief in causality and causal determination, but nevertheless, points at the possibility of freedom, which is not the opposite simply of this causal determination.

In relation to that, if I put it very simply, what you were quoting, I think we could perhaps for the purposes of this discussion, related to what I was saying earlier, namely, when I said that the subject is the lack in the structure, or the lack in the other, we could say that the first part of this saying, “man is not only much more unfree then he believes”, that this first part kind of confronts us with ways in which we are being determined by different structure by the symbolic order, by the discursive order and so on. So, we certainly are determined, that freedom is not to be looked at in he sense that here “we are not determining”... we are completely determined.

But the second part, “we are also much freer than we know” refers to what I was saying before about this structure of causal determination being in itself involved in a moment of inconsistency or lack, which is not simply to say: okay, here, there is no causal determination, there is, but it is constructed in a certain way, which involves a certain gap. You can also say that causality, the

notion of causality as such, always involves a gap, that it is not the same as the law of action and counter action, where the two actions are actually two sides of the same thing, but there is a gap as in this famous dictum by Lacan, when he says that there is only the cause of something that doesn't work completely smoothly. In order for the cause, to be a cause, there is a lapse through which it is determined or it is decided that it is a cause. Not to complicate things too much, we could say that the other cause of determination, in this sense, does not fully cover its own field. So, not that it is their absence or something. Freedom of the subject does not mean that then the subject can overrun causal determination or act against it in some kind of ecstatic act, it means that causal determination itself involves a kind of an internal blind spot and the name of this blind spot is subject, this is all it means. It doesn't refer to some, I don't know what kind of freedom. It is interesting, because this suggests that subject precisely is not the opposite of structure, some kind of autonomous agent or power external to the structure, but the name of the inconsistency of the structure which has this thing built into it, so to say so. And one more thing, because there was a lot of contemporary theory that emphasised also this kind of the omnipotence of the Other, of power and so on. I think this is interesting in this context as well, it has political implications, we can say of course, the power of the Other, of the discourse whatever, can be seen as very paralysing for a human agent – compared to our power. But the claim is, nevertheless, that this doesn't go without contradictions, it has weak points. But on the other hand, for instance, if you think of this notion of micro power, which was kind of very popular, fashionable at some point, I think this notion is symptomatic, because it suggests, contrary to what Lacan is saying, this idea of a closed, uninterrupted continuum of consistency – micro power basically means that power exists, or is filling in, every pore of our social tissue. So, almost like there is no lack in this, there is no inconsistency. And so this is a difference. Of course, if you say there is inconsistency, this does not imply any direct freedom, it is a point when things happen, which open up a certain space of difference, or of difference that makes a difference, and of things that can perhaps be changed in this sense. The lacanian point is simply that there is no uninterrupted continuum of the Other's consistency. Sometimes, the Other and its powers are all the more violent, they act more aggressively and abundantly when precisely this weak point is at stake. So this is not to say that they're simply weak, not at all, but this is something to be taken into account.

**Perunović:** Let's make a huge leap right now and go to your latest book, entitled *What is sex?* In it, you claim that sexuality is the point of the short circuit between ontology and epistemology. Is sex, with all of its ontological gaps and contradictions, with the knowledge that it transmits and that you are pointing at, resisting somehow to the register of the so-called post-truth? What is inevitably true in, or rather, around sex?

**Zupančič:** Yes, that's a very good question. So, okay, the project behind this book was a really big project, which was to try to take sexuality, not simply as something trivial, nor in the sense that it is meaningful or important, but in the sense that it could be taken as the place out of which precisely all these kinds of contradictions and difficulties emerge, and that it has this kind of intrinsic impossibility built into itself. So, this is why I thought it was important to make this investigation on sexuality, an ontological investigation, and not simply an investigation of different sexual practices, habits, gender studies and so on, and obviously, something that I heard many times when I was presenting the book, was that, "okay, but, you know, you took all the joy out of sex"! But I guess this is what the book actually aimed at. Not that we no longer enjoy sex, this is not the point. It is to take it as something that fits all kinds of meanings and stuff, and to show why is this so and how. The subject of my inquiry was the concept of sexuality as proposed and existing in psychoanalysis, particularly in Freud and Lacan, and not what is called sexual practice. So, I insist on this notion, this concept precisely as a concept. Sexuality is very much related, on the one hand, to what we were discussing earlier as this negativity or lack of the structure in the structure, so we can say that sexuality stands with one foot in the lack or negativity, in the minus that defines for Freud topology of the unconscious; but it also stands with its other foot in a surplus of enjoyment, as always something not simply that we want, but on top of what we want. Those notions of the surplus and minus, as I try to show, are precisely intrinsically related in sexuality, and they constitute two faces of the same surface – surface that we could also call the subject, but over here, I focus more on the structure of the drive. But if we take now from another and more popular angle this question of sex and post-truth, or what is true around sex, I would say, first of all, that sex is not the ultimate truth of anything. This is a kind of an unfortunate misunderstanding of Freud – he doesn't say that the sex is the ultimate truth of anything. Rather, he says that sex in the broader sense of sexuality, in its very ontological inconsistency, difficulty and so on, is what throws us out of joy out of self absorption, and makes us precisely curious about things, about others, about truth, open to the even the most metaphysical questions. And indeed, this is what is interesting in the point that psychoanalysis is making: it's not that it reduces all the high thoughts and metaphysical issues to sexuality as the bottom line, it is also that it shows how the sexuality itself is already a highly metaphysical question... The question of debasing, you know, these high ideas in philosophy, it's there, but this is just all about sex, so this is the truth. No, on the opposite, it is really interesting for me in psychoanalysis, how actually, if you look at the sexuality, you already see in display, or you can take out of the very template of the most metaphysical question. So here, I think we could say that I'm really, truly Freudian in this respect – I think that sexuality does drive the quest for knowledge, does drive the quest for truth, and that there is simply no original drive for knowledge as such. So, this is all Freudian..

Yet, sex is not driving the quest for truth in the sense of it being the true motive behind this quest, but precisely as its internal drive; there is something,

as I said, that is sexual in the very drive for knowledge. This is for me the revolutionary thinking about sexuality. Of course not that it is some substance to which we can attribute later other substances, but that is the inherent negativity of all these other substances or you know, also epistemologically. So, in this sense, curiosity, if we take this example when children play, even if they are very small children, curiosity for them not simply about learning how the world is, but also about seeing how the other, their partner, will react to this question: will she blush? What will happen? Does the other really know? I mean, this already involves something and I would simply say: there is sexuality in truth and in its pursuit. So perhaps to turn your question the other way around, we could say that it is not so much the question what is true in or around sex, but about how sex is implicated in truth. How this drive is in truth, where the sex stands in truth, in the very configuration of truth. But does this implication of sexuality in truth, make truth any less valid? No, I don't think so. I don't think this is simply a relativization. It makes truth more interesting, and a more complex notion. And just one more thing, relating to this post-truth. I mean, post-truth, if there is such thing, it looks for me like kind of indifferent. But at the same time, I'm totally convinced that one cannot really be indifferent to truth. I'm not even sure this is possible, we can repress it, but this is not the same thing. And moreover, I really don't see indifference as a predominant effort today. Passions arise in world around us more than they disappear. And the problem is rather that truths are becoming extremely, or almost exclusively, personal, and everybody has a personal big Other, rather than a common, rather than a shared one. So, the social dimension of truth definitely seems to be weakening. This has to do with a lot of things, but I don't think the truth or even passion to get to it is disappearing, but it is structuring in a very different way, and this social link, the way in which it is weakening, this is surely not good news, because then it is open to some kind of very problematic ways of secondary bounding, which we know from history also as not being particularly very fortunate.

**Perunović:** One last question, maybe a general one: what are the challenges of philosophy and theory (the psychoanalytic one maybe in the first place), and how is theory engaged today in the social realm? What made you start writing theory and what makes you keep dealing with it?

**Zupančić:** Very briefly, I'm not sure what made me start writing theory, I don't think I can answer this directly. Definitely some kind of drive to do it. But just perhaps two very brief remarks on this question. I think philosophy and also psychoanalytic theory is always engaged in the social realm, it's not existing somewhere else. But I don't think it works, or it should work, by way of prescribing to reality that it should change or how it should change. I don't think this is where its power and strength lies, because this would not only be kind of presumptions, precisely because we are part of this reality, but also, I think it could block the real change, because these kinds of prescriptions, you know:

this is wrong, we should do to this and that – these prescriptions are always based upon the present configuration, and they are not taking into account precisely the possibility of a radical change, which also would mean to change the very parameters of our present configuration. If we just talk from our present perspective, we can miss a lot. And we can close up our attunement to certain kinds of possibilities. So I think philosophy, also psychoanalysis, basically asks, why is reality such as it is? Not in order to justify it, but precisely to see what internal contradictions it harbours. And what internal contradictions it tries to accommodate or obfuscate or repress and how, by what means? And I think if it does this, it already does a lot. I think this is a lot to have a use of relating to these contradictions.

