



TYPE: Article

Title: Anxiety and the S(Ub)Lime Body of God

Author(s): Clayton Crockett

Source: Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory (JCRT)

Published by: Whitestone Publications

Stable URL: <https://jcrt.org/archives/01.1/crockett/>

DOI (newest version): [10.17613/0bkat-x3c78](https://doi.org/10.17613/0bkat-x3c78)

Copyright © held by the author(s). All rights reserved. This text may be used and shared in accordance with the fair-use provisions of U.S. copyright law. Any use of this text in other ways requires the consent of the author and the publisher, the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, and must cite publication in this journal.

<https://jcrt.org/copyright/>



Crockett - Anxiety and the S(ub)lime Body of God - JCRT 1.1

Clayton Crockett

Wesley College

Clayton Crockett Wesley College

But let us imagine what would take place in a patient who saw in his analyst an exact replica of himself....To take an extreme case, if experienced in the form of strangeness proper to apprehensions of the double, this situation would set up an uncontrollable anxiety on the part of the analysand.
 –Jaques Lacan, *Écrits*

The Jouissance of the Other

In his seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Jacques Lacan provocatively claims that “man’s desire is the desire of the Other.”¹ The Other (*Autre*) represents the social unconscious, but in a structural or functional, rather than ontological sense. Socially, human beings are constructed in their subjectivity by social pressures and demands. There exists within individuals an opening towards the social field as a whole, which is evoked in every action or desire of the individual.

2. One can also think of this situation in a Kantian way, where the Other stands for the universal, which is never encountered as an object of experience, but is rather a social *a priori* evoked by the particular objects and intuitions. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, universal or *a priori* knowledge is defined as knowledge absolutely independent of all experience.”² Furthermore, “we can conclude from the universal to the particular, only so far as universal properties are ascribed to things as being the foundation upon which the particular properties rest.”³ The universal Other is the basis of the particular, but the universal is never directly or immediately intuited, only the particular other object. The Other is the universal or transcendental ideal encountered both in and beyond every particular other, which Lacan calls a *petit objet a*(*utré*).
3. The particular object is a manifestation or encapsulation of the Other as a whole. In this way, the Other is a limit concept because the Other of course only appears in others/objects, but it is a concept which refers to what is ultimately real and important about human sociality and intersubjectivity. Every time you desire a soft drink, in some ways you conform to the desire of the social Other that you purchase and consume, that you affiliate yourself with a certain image and product, and that you integrate yourself into the social order in a particular way. Your desire is not simply your own, but manifests the desire of the Other which expresses itself through you, sometimes in a manipulative and sinister way. Advertising in a commodity-oriented culture intentionally creates or evokes desires, and it attempts to connect with the desire of an individual consumer in order to sell not simply a product but also an image.
4. In a similar way, to desire another person sexually or romantically is not only to desire that particular person in his or her uniqueness and singularity, but it is also to buy into what that person represents socially and symbolically, even if only as a rebellion against prevailing tastes and norms. Who someone is attracted to expresses both a personal taste but also a desired

¹Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p.235.

²Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), p.43. B2 in the German version.

³Ibid., p.538 (A652/B680).

social status, and skinny, clear-skinned models also assist in the construction of this desire. At a fundamental level, your desire is not your own, and this realization can be the cause of enormous anxiety.

5. The term *jouissance* as used by Lacan is not simply an outpouring of sexual passion, and it does not mean what we normally think of as joy. *Jouissance* is desire carried to the extreme, or the absolute limit of desire, which of course is death. In his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan refers to the power of “a sexual *jouissance* that is not sublimated,” but the figure Lacan primarily associates with *jouissance* is Sade.⁴ So *jouissance* is certainly sexual or libidinal in nature, but it is also destructive and ultimately self-destructive passion. This extremity of desire in its destructive capacity evokes horror, because it is unwilling to compromise or negotiate its drive for satisfaction. Socialized humans react with terror or disgust to an eruption of pure enjoyment, which is precisely the unleashing of absolute desire without any constraint or law. Lacan also characterizes *jouissance* as the exemplary manifestation of the Freudian death drive.
6. According to Lacan, “*jouissance* appears not purely and simply as the satisfaction of a need but as the satisfaction of a drive.”⁵ A need refers to an animal need, a purely instinctual affair which has no relation to language, symbolic substitution, or speech, while a drive does possess such a social relation. The relationship between drive and desire is more complicated, but a drive is relatively more immediate, and closer to a need, whereas desire is more explicitly related to language. In some ways, one can understand this distinction between drive and desire along the lines of Freud’s distinction in his essay “The Unconscious” between the idea of an instinct, its ideational presentation (*Repräsentanz*), and a more conventional, conscious representation (*Vorstellung*).⁶ This means that *jouissance* is not simply an unleashing of nature, or instinctive animal passions, but it represents, even if as a limit, an option within the social field.
7. Another aspect of *jouissance* which is often overlooked is that humans beings are not prime movers of *jouissance*, upsetting the social order to fulfill their own satisfactions. “Desire is the desire of the Other,” and the *jouissance* of the Other refers to the Other’s destructiveness which threatens the individual. Even though it is an abstraction, the effects of the *jouissance* of the Other are all too real. An example would be a mob lynching, where the participants are not primarily motivated by individual concerns or passions, but driven to seek justice. This represents an outbreak of *jouissance*, which sacrifices an individual in order to satisfy the Other as a social group, and on some level even the initiators of the act can be thought of as playthings of the Other. Of course, *jouissance* is rarely expressed, but usually rather intimated, where the threat of an outbreak of *jouissance* serves to curb the individual subject’s actions and beliefs.
8. Danielle Bergeron suggests another way to think about the *jouissance* of the Other in her essay on “Aliens and the Psychotic Experience.” She claims that the movie *Aliens* “scripts a psychotic fantasy—the position of a subject who has become an object delivered up to the all-powerful Other that demands entire satisfaction of its needs.”⁷ According to Bergeron, the Alien is a xenomorph, or a radically unfamiliar form which signifies the absence of a father, or any meaningful symbolic order, and therefore the imaginary confrontation with “the real of the

⁴Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), p.199.

⁵Ibid., p.208.

⁶Sigmund Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, edited by Phillip Rieff (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p.126.

⁷Danielle Bergeron, “Aliens and the Psychotic Experience,” in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, edited by Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p.306.

Thing.”⁸ A psychotic is a person who has been completely delivered up to the *jouissance* of the Other, represented in the movie by the little girl, Newt. Ripley’s therapeutic task is to restore her to the position of a subject. Bergeron follows Willy Apollon in claiming that in order to free oneself from the *jouissance* of the Other, one must externalize the Other as an object which is “the determinative step in the process of separation securing the psychotic’s treatment.”⁹ In the case of *Aliens*, the externalization of the Other is the steel Beast which Ripley uses to destroy the “real” Beast, which frees Newt (and also Ripley herself, although not completely, as we discover in the third movie) from being a “plaything of the Other.”¹⁰

9. The Other is usually feminized in its representation, to demonstrate the absence of a father, that is, a signifying relation. For Lacan, psychosis is a disavowal of the Name of the Father, and the acceptance of the Name or Law of the Father is what ensures passage into social discourse and signification. In Bergeron’s essay, the Other is nearly equated with the real, or the Thing, beyond all symbolic relation, but it is important to remember that this representation of the limit of representation and of the real takes place within symbolic discourse and signification.

The Slimy Subject

1. I have set up an opposition between a *jouissance* of the Other experienced as psychotic-demonic and an individual subject characterized as a protagonist. Bergeron’s therapeutic task is to free psychotics from their (mis)understanding of themselves and their situation as that of a plaything in relation to the Other as real and beyond signification, whereas a sane person presumably negotiates a more healthy relation to the social and symbolic Other. Ripley, however, who accomplishes the healing in the little girl, discovers in the third movie that her dream of being invaded by the Alien is not merely a dream. Or in other words, to quote Julia Kristeva, “psychosis is the crisis of truth in language.”¹¹ This means that we are all inhabited by the Other, whether we want to disavow the horror of that insight or not.
2. Furthermore, this relation to the *jouissance* of the Other is not simply an external relation of the subject, but an intimate one which constitutes the subject. Slavoj Žižek claims that the subject or *cogito* comes into existence by the rejection of an absolute formlessness which later horrifies him. Writing about the movie *Alien* in *Tarrying With the Negative*, Žižek claims that: “here we encounter *cogito* at its purest when (what will become) the subject constitutes itself by rejecting the slimy substance of *jouissance*.”¹² In other words, the condition of the emergence of subjectivity involves the rejection of a formless slime which (re)emerges elsewhere as matter. This slimy substance, which was intimate to the embodied human, then exerts a powerful horror but also fascination on him or her. In addition, the emergent and victorious *cogito* is masculinized while the slimy *jouissance* is feminized. Žižek argues that the subject is a pure form, a Kantian “I think,” which cannot be filled out with a determinate content, and that Kant and Hegel draw out these conclusions which Descartes left undeveloped. The real hero for Žižek, however, is Lacan, whose formula for subjectivity implies that “at the very moment of my reduction to a pure *cogito* qua impossible gaze, a formless slime of the substance of *jouissance* had to emerge somewhere else.”¹³ In other words, subjectivity is constituted in

⁸Ibid., p.307.

⁹Ibid., p.312.

¹⁰Ibid., p.312.

¹¹Julia Kristeva, “The True-Real,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.218.

¹²Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.62.

¹³Ibid., p.62.

the process of sloughing off one's body, which is perceived as slime, and this externalized body encountered as substance provokes horror and sublimity.

3. Lacan demonstrates a similar insight in his Seminar II when he describes Freud's reaction to his dream of Irma's Injection. In the dream, Freud looks deeply into the back of his patient's throat and is horrified by what he sees there:

There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the face, the secretory glands *par excellence*, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as it is something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final revelation of *you are this—You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness*.¹⁴

4. This dream represents Freud's famous and first successful self-analysis. His reaction testifies to the enormous anxiety which results when one recognizes oneself in the substance of the *jouissance* of the Other in an uncanny way after the rejection of the body as other. One experiences not simply the determinate form of the human being, but body as body, body as pure substance and absolute formlessness.

Freud's Anxiety and God's Body

1. In his late work, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, Freud revises his previous understanding of anxiety. For most of his professional life, he believed that anxiety was transformed libido, and that it was produced by repression. In his 1915 essay on "The Unconscious," Freud claims that primal repression consists of an "*anticathexis*, by means of which the system Pcs guards itself against the intrusion of the unconscious idea."¹⁵ This anticathexis prevents an unconscious idea from becoming preconscious or conscious, and this process of repression generates "anxiety-hysteria," in which anxiety appears "without the subject knowing what he is afraid of."¹⁶ In 1928, however, he states that he "can no longer maintain this view." Rather, "it was anxiety which produced repression" and not the other way around.¹⁷ This shift in the understanding of anxiety takes place in the context of two important developments of Freud's later years. The first consists of an emphasis on a more literal explanation of castration, which is elaborated in essays such as "The Infantile Genital Organization" and "Anatomical Sex-Distinction." In these essays, the basic difference between boys and girls hinges on a girl's lack of possession of a penis, which is experienced by the girl as a profound lack or wound. The little boy, on the other hand, not only compares his own penis to that of his father, and feels a sense of inferiority regarding size, but more importantly, a boy experiences tremendous anxiety when confronted with the absence of a penis in a girl or woman. The little boy reacts by denying or disavowing the reality he sees, because to admit that girls do not possess a penis is to admit the contingency of his own, and the possibility of losing it. The little girl, on the other hand, presumably knows exactly what she sees and exactly what she wants. Freud's certainty here about female desire contrasts with his famous acknowledgment elsewhere that he cannot understand what (a) woman wants. "A little girl behaves differently," Freud

¹⁴Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), pp.154-55.

¹⁵Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, p.129.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p.130.

¹⁷Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XX, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), pp.108-9.

writes, "She makes her judgment and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it."¹⁸ This anatomical sex-distinction underlies Freud's conclusion in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* that "the anxiety felt in animal phobias is the ego's fear of castration."¹⁹

2. The other feature of Freud's later work, which also manifests itself in the last sentence, is a turn toward the ego as a protagonist in its defenses against a primal id and a punitive superego. It is the ego's fear of castration which prompts anxiety, and this anxiety must be repressed, sublimated, diverted, or otherwise defended in order to survive amid civilization's discontents. Both of these characteristics of Freud's late work, the single-minded focus on the ego as well as the obsessive concern to ground anxiety in a literal concern with castration, are open to criticism. In fact, the overriding theme of Lacan's Seminar II, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, constitutes a critique of ego psychology along with any restriction of psychoanalysis to this practice. Lacan also precludes any identification of the subject (I) with the ego (me). He concludes that the ego is by nature resistant, reactive and inertial, and it attempts to thwart the irruption of insistent speech which marks the truth of the subject.²⁰ To focus on the ego, Lacan holds, is to obliterate the revolutionary power of the problematic Freud opens up.
3. Feminist criticism, both psychoanalytic and anti-psychoanalytic, has problematized Freud's essentialization of biological sex and gender categories, primarily in terms of the universalization of Freud's speculations on the reactions of little boys and girls to the discovery of their respective genitalia.²¹ Freud transfers the value his Viennese culture placed on the virile penis to the formation of every human person, and he presupposes rather than locates the trauma of anxiety in the observation of the other sex's genitals. *There is nothing in itself about female genitals which suggests a lack*, even in relation to a penis, but rather this meaning or value is brought in from elsewhere.
4. One can trouble, therefore, the basis of Freud's shift in the explanation of anxiety, and many interpreters overlook this late development in Freud's thought, for this and other reasons. To call into question the assertion that "the anxiety felt in animal phobias is the ego's fear of castration," however, is not the same thing as to consider what it might mean if "it is always the ego's attitude of anxiety which is the primary thing and which sets repression going," especially if one brackets the term ego in the latter phrase.²² Here I am reading Freud against Freud by taking up his later understanding of anxiety in which anxiety precedes and causes repression, rather than vice versa. At the same time, however, I am critical of the other two developments in Freud's later thought that are connected with this transformed understanding of anxiety, the focus on the ego as protagonist and the adoption of an essentialistic masculine model of sexuality.
5. What if anxiety were the cause of repression, that which sets repression in motion, rather than an aftereffect? How would such an understanding of anxiety transform the rest of the corpus of Freudian (and post-Freudian) psychoanalysis?²³ And more importantly, how would such a

¹⁸Sigmund Freud, "Anatomical Sex-Distinction," in *The Standard Edition*, Volume XIX (1961), p.252.

¹⁹Freud, *Inhibitions*, p.109.

²⁰Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, p.321.

²¹See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). For a profound analysis of the ways in which categories of sex and gender are constructed and wielded, and particularly their intersections with those of race and class, see Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²²Freud, *Inhibitions*, p.109.

²³Elizabeth J. Bellamy characterizes psychoanalysis as a discourse of anxiety rather than desire, an "unlocatable excess of displacement," in her reading of *Othello* as a tale of epistemologically undecidable anxiety. Like the early Freud and most other psychoanalytic thinkers, however, she claims that "anxiety is the (unreadable) failure of repression."

transformation affect theology, however implicitly? What if theology were characterized as a discourse of repression or defense set in motion by an uncontrollable anxiety? Finally, what if theology were to understand how it is implicated in that anxiety by thinking the anxiety itself as God?

6. To bring together a notion of theology as a discourse of anxiety, or possibly a discourse which responds to anxiety, along with Lacan and Žižek's understanding of the constitution of subjectivity as a rejection of the substance of the *jouissance* of the Other, is to ask about the body of God. One can read the history of theology as an uncontrollable anxiety regarding God which theologians often attempt to cover over or contain. Martin Luther's writings, for example, illustrate a tremendous anxiety regarding justification. In his treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian*, for example, Luther claims that "the moment you begin to have faith you learn that all things in you are sinful and damnable."²⁴ Luther writes at length how "savage and destructive a beast is a guilty conscience," that whips or tortures the individual soul "as if it were in hell."²⁵ On this reading of anxiety, one could understand Luther's discourse as connected to a profound horror of the body of God understood as substance or *jouissance*. On the one hand, theologians attempt to deny God any materiality or capriciousness, representing divinity as pure self-transparent thinking, a *cogito* writ large. On the other hand, this disavowal of the body of God by most orthodox theologians leads to a return of the repressed, understood as an experience of absolute sinfulness or damnation.
7. In addition, nature which cannot be harnessed under divine providence and purpose become demonized as the source of profound horror. I am thinking of nature "red in tooth and claw," which is experienced as slimy, gooey, oozing, primordial, insect-like, reptilian, voracious, etc. Although some of the resonances of this description of nature are Darwinian, in a classical sense nature can be understood as unformed matter, which in some Neo-Platonic, Christian and Gnostic thinking is viewed with profound antipathy if not horror. Nature at its most hideous takes on the aspects of absolute formlessness which characterizes the substance of the *jouissance* of the Other as a sublime Thing. This vision is encapsulated, as Žižek points out, by the Alien, but one can see another manifestation in the Borg, which is the cyborg yet strangely hivelike collective consciousness which serves as the enemy in *Star Trek VIII: First Contact*. The sinister enemy of Picard and the crew compromises the distinction between living creature and machine in a way which recalls Donna Haraway's description of a cyborg, and it threatens to totalize or colonize all individual intelligent consciousness in its voracious hunger or desire.²⁶ For the heroes, it is essential to distinguish Data as an android from Picard as a living and passionate human, even though Data desires to become human. In fact, the desire to become human validates Data and makes his power over the Borg acceptable because it reaffirms cherished humanistic values. In some ways, the Borg can be understood as reflecting a modern and humanistic horror of a certain understanding of postmodernism.

Not-All vs. the Exception: Anxiously Writing the Body of God

1. We can understand this description of sublime nature in the history of theology, then, as a return of the repressed. By ignoring or avoiding questions concerning the embodiment

"Othello's Lost Handkerchief: Where Psychoanalysis Finds Itself," in Lacan, *Politics, Aesthetics*, pp.151-79.

²⁴Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, translated by W.A. Lambert, in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p.281.

²⁵What Luther Says: *An Anthology*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), Volume I, p.336.

²⁶See Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.149-81.

or sexuality of God, theology enacts a repression which later erupts in the form of a sublime *jouissance*, which creates ever more powerful anxiety. This is a reading of theology in the light of Freud's earlier version of anxiety, where anxiety is a reaction or response to repression. In order to grasp an alternative reading, where theology would understand itself as a repressive response to anxiety, I want to return to Žizek and read his dichotomy between the mathematical and the dynamical sublime.

2. According to Žizek's Lacanian reading of Kant, "the split of the Sublime itself...into 'mathematical' and 'dynamical' Sublime, is far from negligible since it directly concerns sexual difference."²⁷ In other words, although the distinction between beauty and sublime in Kant and others is commonly seen in terms of a feminine beauty and a masculine sublime, Žizek argues that sexual difference is more primordially inscribed into the split of the sublime into mathematical and dynamical. Žizek continues by associating the mathematical sublime with the feminine, while the dynamical sublime is inherently masculine. He then relates Kant's distinctions of the sublime back to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant divides the Antinomies into mathematical and dynamical. Finally, Žizek combines this Kantian philosophical logic with Lacan's sexual distinction of the feminine as "not all" and the masculine as universality constituted through exception.²⁸
3. "The first two ('mathematical') antinomies are 'feminine' and reproduce the paradoxes of the Lacanian logic of 'not-all,'" Žizek writes, "whereas the last two ('dynamical') antinomies are 'masculine' and reproduce the paradoxes of universality constituted through exception."²⁹ For Žizek, "not-all" refers to the priority of the limit over what lies beyond the limit. Woman is "not-all" because she does not exhaust the possibilities of gender expressions. This logic implies that any particular remains one of a finite but uncircumscribable or uncalculable number of possibilities. This represents a limit because keeping within a limit does not cut off the exfoliation or enumeration of alternative expressions. In fact, Žizek claims that the limit is what gives a beyond-the-limit. In the case of Kant, the split between phenomena and noumena creates a noumenon, that is, the barrier which renders the "thing-in-itself" unknowable is what provides certainty that there is a "thing-in-itself". Exceptionality, however, gives priority to the beyond over the limit, and posits the limit as already overcome, at least in principle.³⁰ A Lacanian understanding of the masculine as the exception posits a limit which man is an exception to because he has passed beyond the limit. This cuts off the alternative possibilities as circumscribed by the limit, and privileges the one unique exception. In a more strictly theological sense, God is usually constituted not only as male but also according to this logic of exceptionality.
4. On the one hand, we could critique Žizek's interpretation of the constitution of subjectivity as a masculine privilege of exceptionality whereby the cogito determines itself as pure thought by rejecting embodiment and then being repulsed by its externalization in a *jouissance* of substance. Superficially, as Žizek admits, Lacan's characterization of "woman" as limit or "not-all" and "man" as universality constituted through an exception beyond the limit is ripe

²⁷ Žizek, *Tarrying With the Negative*, p.53.

²⁸ I am primarily dealing here with Žizek's use of Lacan's formulas of sexualization. For Lacan's presentation of this distinction, see Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX Encore 1972-1973*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), especially pp.64-81.

²⁹ Ibid., p.57.

³⁰ This privileging of beyond over limit is the standard reading of speculative idealism, especially Fichte and Hegel, although Žizek conducts a very original, Kantian, and counter-intuitive reading of Hegel which claims that Hegel radicalizes the finitude Kant asserts rather than overcoming it. See *Tarrying With the Negative*, Chapter Three: "Hegel's Logic of Essence," pp.125-61.

for feminist criticism.³¹ On the other hand, Žizek affirms the priority of the mathematical, feminine sublime, or the “not-all,” over the masculine, dynamical exceptionality, just as Lacan affirms that “I believe in the jouissance of woman insofar as it is extra.”³² Rather than settle the issue, however, I want to map Žizek’s dichotomy or polarity onto my reading of Freudian anxiety and its respective theological counterpart.

5. I have suggested that an understanding of anxiety as a response to repression can lead to an anxious theology which must defensively struggle with the return of the repressed. This relationship of repression to anxiety can also be thought in terms of Žizek’s logic of exceptionality, the dynamical sublime, and a priority of beyond over limit. Such a theology is constrained to think God solely in terms of exceptionality and paradoxical universality which mirrors the Cartesian exceptional subject. God is the exception which proves or upholds the rule, and God’s beyond or divine sphere establishes the finite world as limit. This very exceptionality, however, provokes tremendous anxiety, because the intimate or “extimate” relation between God and the world remains problematic, and finite humans must always already exist beyond the limit to which they are consigned in order to think God, that is, to think theologically.
6. In terms of the dynamical sublime, that is, the elevation of human dignity or moral worth over the raging power of nature which is felt as an exceptional connection to divinity, Žizek points out the intimate and unsettling relation between the dynamical sublime and the superego. “The logic at work in the experience of the dynamical sublime is therefore,” he writes:

true, I may be a tiny particle of dust thrown around by wind and sea, powerless in face of the raging forces of nature, *yet all this fury of nature pales in comparison with the absolute pressure exerted on me by the superego, which humiliates me and compels me to act against my fundamental interests!*³³

7. The structure of the dynamical sublime is here understood in terms of a logic of exceptionality, that is, an exception to the forces of nature. A transcendent dignity given from beyond (usually God) raises humanity above the nature which threatens to destroy it. The logic of this sublimity recoils into the psychoanalytic notion of the superego, however, because the inherent dignity cannot be separated from one’s own conscience, and (as we saw in Luther) this guilty conscience flays the human soul more powerfully than the external might of nature.
8. If we think of anxiety as a limiting or fixation of attention from the beyond to the limit, then the attempt to surmount the limit and reach the beyond inevitably fails, which is another form of the logic of the return of the repressed. According to the neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux, the difficulties of schizophrenics with thought and language can be “interpreted as defects in attention, involving both poor selectivity...and excessive fixation of attention.”³⁴ The fixation on a beyond effectively limits access to the beyond and bars it, which prompts a further eruption of anxiety. Of what, then, does the alternate understanding of anxiety consist? Following the later Freud, and taking anxiety to be the source of repression, we could think

³¹As Žizek acknowledges, this interpretation posits that “woman” is nothing in herself, but only what she is for “man’s” enjoyment, or *jouissance*. Later in the book, however, Žizek conducts a Lacanian reversal of symptom and ground, which argues that contrary to the manifest reading, “Man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom,” he ex-sists outside himself, through woman, whereas woman, being not-all, does not ex-sist, but possesses an insistence which “does not only come to be through man.” *Tarrying With the Negative*, p.188.

³²Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p.77.

³³*Ibid.*, p.47.

³⁴Jean-Pierre Changeux, *Neuronal Man*, translated by Laurence Garey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.157.

about repression less in terms of its widespread negative connotations than in terms of a Nietzschean active forgetting.

9. Nietzsche asserts that "it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present, without forgetfulness."³⁵ Any total memory or complete recall would be paralyzing, because one could not act affirmatively without "forgetting" that every argument has at least two sides, that every position and point of view is perspectival, etc. Such a forgetting would not necessarily be solely conscious, that is, undertaken by the ego, but it would be a genuine response to anxiety. In this vein, we could petition Freud's notion of an "evenly hovering attention" to describe an initial response to anxiety, and this state would lie closer to the situation of "not-all" described by Žižek. This dispersion of attention would not preclude, but rather function as the precondition for repression. Here the limiting of attention does not create anxiety, because *anxiety exists prior to such a limiting*. Limiting is not the restriction of a beyond to a limit, but rather a selection in the Bergsonian sense of an image or thought which selects an alternative and "forgets" the other possibilities.³⁶ It is that very process of selection, however, that distributes the other possibilities in the constitution of a beyond. Every selection is "not-all," the limit precedes the beyond, and this situation is repressive only to the extent that any choice or selection is repressive or forgetful of other choices, but they only become real choices in the determination of the choice itself.
10. In the *Critique of Judgment*, The mathematical sublime attests to the struggle or "discordant accord" between imagination's attempt to show and comprehend the infinite and reason's demand that imagination be able to do just that.³⁷ Such a task is impossible for the imagination under the strict pressure of reason's demand, but that very tension allows for the appearance of beauty by means of the sublime. The limit traced out by the struggle between reason and imagination in their profound finitude produces the beyond of the limit, which is the thought of the supersensible.³⁸ Similarly, in the First Critique, the "not-all" of the mathematical antinomies generates the beyond of the world of things as they are in themselves as a product of our intuitions and concepts of phenomenal experience. Here again the limit precedes the beyond and gives rise to it, which is the true meaning of finitude in Kant, Freud, and Žižek.³⁹
11. A repressive theology would be a theology of finitude, but not in the sense that it restricts itself from progressing beyond some imaginary line. The "beyond" is neither prohibited nor nonexistent, but it does not lie elsewhere than the limit, which is also a bounds or a boundary, as in Kant's "Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone." The limit gives or generates the beyond, finitude generates the "in-finite." Such a theology represents a selective response to a generalized anxiety, which would be prepared by the approximation

³⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p.58.

³⁶See Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by T.E. Hulme (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp.27-28.

³⁷Gilles Deleuze characterizes the relationship among the Kantian faculties as a discordant or contingent accord in *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.54.

³⁸On the relationship of imagination and reason in the mathematical sublime, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), pp.109-116.

³⁹The main distinction between Žižek and Lacan here is the notion of finitude, because Lacan in *Seminar XX* relates the "not-all" to an infinite set in order for it to not function as an exception (p.103). Lacan deals with classical Aristotelian logic, where any negation would have to constitute an exception, and it is on the other hand modern forms of "infinite" mathematics and logic that allow a thinking of negation or "not-all" which would not fall into a logic of exceptionality. Here I am following Žižek by relating Lacan's distinction to a *philosophical* understanding of finitude as opposed to a metaphysical infinite which could only function as an exception to worldly finitude understood as simply the realm of human experience.

of an attitude of evenly hovering attention. In this way, constructive theological discourse traces or constitutes the limit, which is only way to get at or talk about any beyond. In addition, this constructive theological thinking should be distinguished from a clinical or more classically psychoanalytical therapeutic discourse which attempts to analyze the effects of anxiety produced by the return of the repressed in more traditional theological writings. The aim of a truly constructive theological thinking is to write the body of God.

12. Despite the attractiveness of this second model, I cannot deny that theology remains repression, and this is at one and same time a tragic fact and a liberating possibility related to our condition as thinking human beings.⁴⁰ In addition, both views (theology as anxiety, theology as repression) are necessary in order to think about theology and psychoanalysis at a general level. In fact and in practice, this distinction is extremely fluid, such that theology transforms itself from anxiety to repression and back again within any single work of theology. My wager, however, is that theological thinking is ultimately more creative when understood as repression in this specific sense rather than as anxiety. The task for such a theology is to write the body of God, but not as a theological limit to or of a God that lies unreachably transcendent and beyond. God is rather the limit, the beyond within the limit, that is, anxiety itself, and theology is productive/repressive with it.

Notes

⁴⁰See Charles E. Winkquist, *Epiphanies of Darkness* (Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, Publishers, 1999), who states: "Writing is repression. Theology is writing. Theology is repression" (p.53).