

# THE SUBJECT SUPPOSED TO RECYCLE

Campbell Jones

If Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* articulated the moral and theological coordinates of the subject of labor, how are these rearticulated today in the experience of the subject who consumes? The will to consume or not, and what to consume and how, has been a moral and religious problem since the most ancient times. And today these traces continue to haunt us, not just because we are now veritably surrounded by commodities, but because of the way in which we are today invited to respond to that situation.

Today we are supposed to recycle. We are told again and again of this need, and that it is good to do so. That we are supposed to take care to recycle has almost reached the level of a duty or moral law, and this moral law circulates in the way we symbolize acts of consumption. We are *supposed to* in the strong sense that we should, moreover we must, and to not do so would make us guilty of a breach. To choose not to recycle is an act of bad faith, a careless failure of duty, responsibility and care.

But who is the "we" of this moral imperative? Who is this subject who is supposed to recycle? Where do we locate, and is it possible to locate, the agent of this moral responsibility? These questions are fundamental if we are to understand this contemporary moral injunction, and because of this are crucial if we—but who this "we" is remains to be specified—are to respond to it.

Between Weber and today what is different is not the religious nature of economic action. Rather there has been a transformation from what Weber presents as the idea of salvation through "good works" and above all of the promise of labor without end, to the permanent threat of the apocalypse that will overcome us if we continue to consume in the way we do.<sup>1</sup> Generalized risk of apocalypse, then, a risk that presents itself as the almost inevitable endgame of capitalist overconsumption. But this time the apocalypse is not a threat from the outside but rather something on which we can

count, and for which we are all ultimately responsible.

We are responsible, many say, because it is our very own consumption choices, and the way that these coincide with production methods and distribution circuits that are clearly unsustainable, that are the root cause of the impending end of life on earth. But we have it in our own hands to forestall this apocalypse, and in this sense we are today invited into a care for the planet that is accompanied by an almost paranoiac "care of the self."<sup>2</sup> It is these subjective correlates of this new moral imperative that I propose to bring into focus in this essay.

These dynamics, which are immediately raised by the notion of the subject supposed to recycle, can be seen more broadly today in the value that is put on sustainable or ethical consumption more generally. By this, we signal conscious efforts to make consumption choices that will have some broader benefits, often environmental but equally social, whether this is through choosing organic vegetables, fair trade coffee, dolphin-friendly tuna, ecological washing liquid, products from sustainable sources, or any of a range of carbon-neutral or environmentally friendly products. Such products now clearly cover a significant area of economic activity, even if the consequences of such developments remain at present largely symbolic or "ideological," which is not to diminish their importance. So although I will focus here on recycling, I do hope that these considerations might offer something of a contribution to clarifying the moral, religious and metaphysical grounds of consumption in contemporary capitalism more broadly.

Before turning to the subject supposed to recycle and the two aspects of that subjectivity that I propose we need to analyze—guilt and freedom—it may be useful to consider certain aspects of the ontological status of the subject and object of recycling, and in doing so to demonstrate the implications of what will be one of our guiding concerns, that is, the place in the subject and object of recycling of the trace of the Other. As will emerge when I later

turn to guilt and freedom, these dynamics of displacement, transference or substitution from one to the Other will be central in diagnosing the failures of the subject supposed to recycle, and also for thinking beyond this subject.

### **Subject and Object**

Recycling is necessarily a matter of freedom. To recycle presupposes both a freedom of the object and of the subject. Freedom of the object in so far as not every thing can be recycled, and freedom of the subject in so far as the action of recycling requires some capacity for agency on behalf of the consuming subject. It is therefore no coincidence that freedom is one of the ever present issues when considering recycling.

The conditions of freedom of the object to be recycled are often cast in terms of what is known as “recyclability.” For something to be recycled it must be produced in such a way that it has at least the potential to be recycled. Thus we say that nuclear waste is less recyclable than non-bleached paper. There is something in the residue, the remainder after consumption, that is able to be put to another use, and this is a determining condition of recyclability. But recyclability alone does not guarantee recycling. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition. The other condition of possibility rests in the subjects supposed to recycle, who may do so, or may not. Recyclability exists not merely in objects or subjects but in a complex space between object and subject.

At the same time that recyclability is a condition of possibility of recycling, it is a leading alibi for not recycling. Products proudly announce their nature as recyclable in ways that often simultaneously destroy any notion that they would ever be recycled. It is today possible to buy all manner of products that promise that they are recyclable, but that dissimulate the conditions of their recyclability. For example it is possible to choose, instead of regular nails, to buy one hundred percent recyclable exterior nails. The nails in question are galvanized nails, which means that they have been subjected to hot-dipping in zinc, a process which prevents corrosion when exposed to the elements. These are nails for external use, and galvanized nails are widely used in outdoor

construction. The nails I have before me, however, are fiber cement nails, that is, they are specifically designed to be driven into fibrous materials, most commonly brick or concrete. One must ask then what it means that such nails be recyclable. Under what conditions are we anticipating that nails driven into concrete will later be carefully removed, collected, and taken to be recycled?

In this example we see not only the fantastic nature of claims about objects that might be recycled. What is crucial is the intersection of these objects with active, and at least minimally free, subjects. The conditions of possibility of recycling are partly imbedded in the object supposed to be recycled, but equally in the agency of a subject supposed to recycle. Faced with this package of nails, responsibility falls on the user, who is here constituted as the subject supposed to recycle. It is once again a matter of a particular subjective agency to choose to use these nails or not, and with this to deal with the psychological and above all moral ramifications of that choice.

Recycling is a matter of freedom of subject and object, and is deeply laden with moral valuations. These moral grounds are multiplied when we recall that we are by necessity in the sphere of what Kant calls “practical reason,” of freedom of the will in the face of moral duties. Moreover, we are in the space of morality in so far as, faced with a product, we at the same time come face to face with the trace of the Other.

### **The Trace of the Other**

The subject is supposed to recycle not merely in the interest of their own pleasure or self-preservation. Recycling is in the interest of the Other. And in this sense the subject and the Other are far more interconnected than intimated so far. Recycling is precisely a matter of a relation between a subject and an object, and above all of what remains of that object after use. Recycling is a question of what remains of the object for other subjects after use by a subject. Recycling is in this sense a matter of a mediated relation to others, in that a subject is, with objects, before others. Not just with Kant then, who helps us see the place of freedom in the act of recycling, but as much with Levinas, recycling is an encounter with the Other, in

which I do not immediately encounter the Other but leave for the Other clear material traces.<sup>3</sup>

If for Levinas ethics is a matter of openness to the face of the Other, we are dealing here with a situation of non-immediate, that is to say mediated, relations with the Other. Here the question is one of our relation to the disposal of the remains of the objects of consumption. We should stress, though, that the mediation of these relations to the Other through commodity relations makes them no less questions of ethics. As Derrida stressed in his second critique of Levinas, the fact of the Other not being immediately “present” does not in any way diminish the reality of the relation to the Other. On the contrary, the relation to the Other is always mediated, and it is foolishness to preserve ethics to the realm of the immediacy of the face to face encounter with the Other.<sup>4</sup>

When we talk about recycling we are talking about products rather than services. We are considering relations to objects rather than immediate relations to subjects. This does not mean that these relations to objects do not also always involve relations to subjects, but rather that they are mediated in the form of goods, in the commodity-form. Thus it is here important to note Derrida’s insistence that one can encounter an Other not only “in the flesh” but in ways that are symbolically, socially, and technologically mediated. The slogan of this presence-in-mediation would then be, to paraphrase Derrida: *at this very moment in this product here I am*.

This is clearly recognized in the critique of commodity fetishism.<sup>5</sup> This critique demonstrates the persisting traces of human activity in the objects of consumption, and recalls the reality of the relations of production in the object, even when the product presents itself as nothing more than an object of utility. To the other side of the critique of commodity fetishism, though, my efforts here are to articulate something of the mystifications on the other side of the product, with respect to the ghostly afterlife of products in the social relations of their disposal. If the critique of commodity fetishism typically draws attention to the disguising of the social relations of production, here I propose to stress the social relations implicated in the disposal of goods.

## PHILOSOPHY TODAY

## Transference

The thinking of the subject supposed to recycle proposed here draws on what Lacan called “*le sujet supposé savoir*” which can be translated as “the subject supposed to know” or “the supposed subject of knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> Lacan’s treatment of the subject supposed to know develops out of his reading of Freud’s concept of transference. Transference was the theme of Lacan’s eighth seminar and is the fourth of the “fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis” that are treated in his eleventh seminar.<sup>7</sup>

For Freud, transference is “a universal phenomenon of the human mind” and “a factor of undreamt-of importance.”<sup>8</sup> Freud describes transference in his 1912 paper on “The Dynamics of Transference” in analysis as “a perfectly normal and intelligible thing that the libidinal cathexis of someone who is partly unsatisfied, a cathexis which is already held in anticipation, should be directed as well to the figure of the doctor.”<sup>9</sup> And who in this life, we might ask, is not at least partly unsatisfied? Freud continues:

The peculiarities of the transference to the doctor, thanks to which it exceeds, both in amount and nature, anything that could be justified on sensible or rational grounds, are made intelligible if we bear in mind that this transference has precisely been set up not by *conscious* anticipatory ideas but by those that have been held back or are unconscious.<sup>10</sup>

This transference to the analyst that exceeds anything sensible or rational is captured in what Lacan calls the subject supposed to know. Lacan shows the way that, in the analytic situation, the analyst attributes to the analyst an astonishing ability to know everything, even at the same time that there is a suspicion that the analyst might not know anything. Lacan writes that “Even the psychoanalyst put in question is credited with a certain infallibility.”<sup>11</sup>

Lacan stresses that this subject supposed to know, which is “the pivot on which transference is articulated” was discovered long before Freud.<sup>12</sup> We find the attribution of astonishing powers of knowing, the supposition of a subject supposed to know in, for example, Alcibiades’ fantasies about Socrates.<sup>13</sup> Lacan

also gives examples such as the way that Descartes, presuming to found sure knowledge in his powers of reason ultimately has recourse to what is for him the ultimate subject supposed to know, God.<sup>14</sup>

My concern here, though, is not just with what can be known by the senses or reason, but with what is supposed to be known, and in particular the supposed subjects of such knowledge, and hence I am concerned with what Slavoj Žižek has called “the supposed subjects of ideology.”<sup>15</sup> I am concerned with the subjective categories supposed or presupposed by ideology, in this case the ideology of recycling. What is important is that the question is not so much the ideology presupposed by particular subjects, but rather, the subjects presupposed by a particular ideology. When I speak of recycling as an ideology, I should note that I do not want to too quickly offend my well-meaning fellow inhabitants of this earth who might take affront at the idea that recycling is an ideology. Rather, I propose to stress that recycling is, amongst other things, an idea, and not all ideas, even those that promise the good, are as simply good as they appear.

### Catastrophe

An ideology never presupposes one single character. Here, instead of working from a supposed ideology to one particular subject we might, by working backwards as it were, give some focus to the ideology that I have in mind by sketching two potential archetypes that might enable us to conceive of a variety of particular subjects and in doing so to clarify some of the subjective correlates of the ideology of recycling.

The first of these subjects I propose to call the catastrophic subject supposed to recycle. It should be recalled that this subject position is not universally occupied, and in fact it has an evil twin, who can be called the complacent subject. Of course complacency is not pure evil, and complacency refers more to the sense of registering the current environmental situation and not sensing a particularly overwhelming demand to respond. It is a matter of acceptance or resignation that “things are as they are,” that there is little that one can do about it, or that doing anything about it would be an unfair or unreasonable demand. The complacent

subject is, put simply, not called radically into question by the world outside.<sup>16</sup> As a recent advertising campaign for the Unilever tea brand PG Tips put it, all you need to do is this: “Do your bit—put the kettle on.” For the complacent subject, it would seem, you can have your planet and eat it too.<sup>17</sup>

For the catastrophic subject, this is simply not good enough. The catastrophic subject senses a real and present danger in the current environmental situation, and with this a will that things should change. Things must be different. This is a subjectivity that is both alert to the conditions of the world and takes responsibility for that situation. The catastrophic subject senses the catastrophe of the current situation and moreover is willing to act responsibly in response.

This catastrophic subject was the presupposition of a recent advertising campaign run by the Danish daily left-wing newspaper *Politiken*. This campaign, which ran throughout Denmark in print, on billboards and in metro stations and buses, featured the scene of a vast deforested landscape in which trees have been brutally felled. Against this backdrop a caption promotes the “new catastrophically big Sunday paper.” This campaign is at one level a “joke,” and it follows other similarly excessive campaigns by *Politiken*. It is also connected with an environmental campaign according to which for every tree cut down in producing the paper, two will be planted. But what is interesting in this campaign is not so much its immediate presentation, but the way that it crystallizes a particular subjectivity. In fact, this campaign necessarily presupposes a particular subject. This image of a devastated forest will not be of concern to all, and certainly not to the complacent subject.<sup>18</sup> The *Politiken* campaign presupposes a certain moral outrage on behalf of the catastrophic subject, in which one feels affronted by the almost Brechtian honesty of the image.

The catastrophic subject clearly takes a number of forms, from the moderate neurotic to the obsessive-compulsive composter. The catastrophic subject *cares*, is concerned about the consequences of their actions, and even if others will take pleasure while forests are slaughtered, this subject sees, witnesses, and knows the full extent of the catastrophe. The catastrophic subject is pained by this, and

knows that s/he alone must take responsibility, must act.

While the complacent subject has freedom to act but experiences little or no guilt, the catastrophic subject is marked by both freedom and guilt. The question we will have to face is whether or not it is on the terrain of such subjectivities that the ideological contest over the future of life on earth is to be fought. My concern will be, first, if catastrophic subjectivity is the appropriate response, and more profoundly, if *any* particular subjective response is the ground for responsibility. I follow this thread by turning to questions of guilt and freedom in turn.

### Guilt

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud wrote that “the price we pay for civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt.”<sup>19</sup> Here, as elsewhere in Freud, we could almost certainly substitute “capitalism” for “civilization.” This is indeed what Walter Benjamin does when he writes that “capitalism is presumably the first case of a religion that does not atone but produces guilt.”<sup>20</sup> But beyond making this connection, we need much more of an account of the social processes of the inducement to guilt. We need, in particular, to account for the place, in economic processes, of the displacement, or the transference, of guilt from one subject to another.

In his aphorisms “On the History of the Moral Sensations” in *Human, All Too Human*, we find clues towards this end, as Nietzsche articulates again how things such as moral sentiments can emerge from their opposites.<sup>21</sup> In his critique of “the fable of intelligible freedom,” he argues that “the history of the moral sensations is the history of an error, the error of accountability, which rests upon the error of freedom of will.”<sup>22</sup> Further:

it is because man *regards* himself as free, not because he is free, that he feels remorse and pangs of conscience.—This feeling is, moreover, something one can disaccustom oneself to, and many people do not feel it at all in respect of actions which evoke it in others. It is a very changeable thing, tied to the evolution of moral-

ity and culture and perhaps present in only a relatively brief span of world-history.<sup>23</sup>

These ideas are elaborated later in more detail, in particular in book two of *The Genealogy of Morals*, which deals with “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and Related Matters.”<sup>24</sup> Here Nietzsche accounts for what he calls “man’s interiorization” and the process of “the growth of what is later called man’s *soul*.”<sup>25</sup> These processes of the formation of bad conscience and guilt are mistakes, for Nietzsche, and find their root in religion, and in particular in Christianity. In a framing later picked up by Freud and Benjamin, he writes: “The advent of the Christian god, the ‘highest potency’ god yet conceived by man, has been accompanied by the widest dissemination of the sense of indebtedness, guilt.”<sup>26</sup>

For Nietzsche this sense of guilt is connected importantly to freedom and to ideas of the will. But guilt involves a pathological will, a will turned back on itself and intent on self-destruction, what Freud will later call the “death drive” and the “compulsion to repeat.”<sup>27</sup> For Nietzsche, guilt is a result of “psychological cruelty,” an internalized cruelty that reflects a cruelty that can no longer be directed against the external world. “In such psychological cruelty we can see an insanity of the *will* that is without parallel: man’s will to find himself guilty, and unredeemably so; his will to believe that he must be punished to all eternity without ever expunging his guilt.”<sup>28</sup>

When we recognize the subjective aspects of the way that recycling is typically treated, we can clearly see an interiorization of guilt. But not only this. This interiorization on the part of consumers is accompanied, or is perhaps the result of, a massive displacement or transference of guilt.

Faced with the option to recycle, we might then want to ask why we should have to make that choice. Why should I, who am so little in control of production and distribution processes, have to choose? Here we again face the cripplingly oppressive anxiety that Renata Salecl has identified as central to contemporary consumerism. As Salecl puts it, the motto of the new marketing moralism is no longer “Just do it!,” but rather: “No matter what you do, you will do it wrong, but it is better to follow our advice and try again.”<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps, then, the properly moral subject is the one who refuses to allow their subjectivity to enter into the process, who refuses to take responsibility for the catastrophe. The subject who refuses to accept the invitation to permanent guilt and paranoid self-concern that one hasn't done enough. Is then the ethical subject the one who says, "I am not responsible and do not want to be blamed"? In which case, maybe Camus' figure of Meursault, who says on hearing of the death of his mother, "It's not my fault," is not such a grotesque character after all.<sup>30</sup>

Yes, and no. No, first of all, if this means using such a strategy as an alibi for inaction, or if one treats the current situation as if one has nothing at all to do with it. But in a certain way we also need to consider what can be found in turning our eyes away from the consuming subject supposed to recycle, and turn instead to the conditions of that subject.

There are different ways to refuse responsibility, and one of these is to refuse localization in one's subjectivity and one's choices. Such a turning of the tables would be then to open things at the other end, to shift agency away from where it is so often located today, that is, in consumer choice. This displacement is a first step, and if it seems minor, then we must consider the radical nature of a gesture that removes the vast body of consumers from the center stage of guilt.

### Freedom

In addition to guilt, we face here difficult questions with respect to freedom. It might be thought that what is being proposed here is a threat to freedom, and the nobility and purity of the will. This is certainly the case, but it is probably better to say that alongside a critical reappraisal of the displacement of guilt, what is urgently needed is to grasp the way that situations such as recycling today demand an adequate account of freedom.

As is well known, the central category of Kant's moral theory and of his conception of reason more generally is the concept of freedom. In the preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant writes that "the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of

pure reason."<sup>31</sup> But what is more complex and what is so often missed is the complex interrelations between freedom and the binding character of the moral law. Freedom and morality require autonomy of the will, but that autonomy is not, for Kant, purely or simply opposed to law. On the contrary, freedom and law are co-substantial. For Kant, "freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law."<sup>32</sup>

Thus Kant insists that "freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other."<sup>33</sup> The target here is naive conceptions of freedom that conceive of freedom merely as "freedom from," which fail to recognize what Kant calls "the positive concept of freedom."<sup>34</sup> Against the idea that moral legislation is a restriction or a limitation of freedom, Kant turns things on their head. It is not freedom or a free will that creates the moral law, he argues. Free will is something of which we could not be immediately conscious nor could it be deduced from the appearances of the world.

It is . . . the *moral law*, of which we become immediately conscious (as soon as we draw up maxims of the will for ourselves), that *first* offers itself to us and, inasmuch as reason presents it as a determining ground not to be outweighed by any sensible conditions and indeed quite independent of them, leads directly to the concept of freedom.<sup>35</sup>

It is in this context that Kant introduces his famous example of the man with "lustful inclinations" who runs up against the moral law.<sup>36</sup> When balancing his desire for pleasure against the threat of death this man is able to control his lustful inclinations. But when asked to give false testimony against an innocent and honorable man on pain of his death, it becomes possible to imagine that he would refuse to lie and as a result sacrifice his life. Kant's conclusion from this example is as far-reaching as it is radical. The man of lustful inclinations does not necessarily commit to what he will do when faced with this dilemma, but what is certain is that it would be possible for him to sacrifice everything for a moral duty, while this is unimaginable, Kant argues, when merely balancing pleasures and pains. Kant concludes that "He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which,

without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.”<sup>37</sup>

What is critically at question here is the place of the subject with respect to the moral law. Kant’s wager that freedom arises from and is not in conflict with the moral law has led to all manner of confusions, and in part these confusions come from assuming that freedom is the possession of an autonomous subject. Some other parts of Kant’s work clearly invite such an understanding, but there is much that militates in other directions, aspects that involve calling into question the subject of moral action.

What is most important here is the displacement, transference or substitution of morality. By this I am referring to the way that characteristics presumed to belong to one subject are re-located in another subject, are embodied in things or, in the case of Kant, the way that the moral law can stand in the place of the subject. We should recall that substitution of one for the Other is a central category in Levinas’s later ethics.<sup>38</sup> But here we are not considering so much the moral value of the examples that Levinas takes up, such as taking the food from one’s mouth and giving it to the Other. Rather, what we face here is the bitter pill that we are being asked to swallow when held accountable and responsible for the action of the Other. And in this sense displacement and substitution are more ambivalent than Levinas typically acknowledges, in the sense that morality and guilt can, and indeed sometimes must, *go the other way*. That is to say, there is a certain freedom in giving away our guilt. Giving it, that is to say, to the Other.

To think such a displacement of moral agency, we must comprehend the decentering of the subject, which is why the category of transference is so crucial for understanding the subject supposed to recycle. The kind of transference I have in mind here is forcefully articulated in Žižek’s account of what he calls “primordial substitution,” that is, a substitution from one to the other of beliefs, but moreover of “every one of the subject’s innermost feelings and attitudes.”<sup>39</sup> Žižek offers a number of examples of this substitution, such as “weepers” hired to cry at funerals, “canned laughter” on television comedies that “laughs for you,” and Tibetan prayer wheels that “pray for you.”<sup>40</sup> With all of these examples, Žižek seeks

to demonstrate the way that characteristics usually reserved for the subject can be externalized and then recognized as possessions of the subject even though they remain in a position of externality: “This is what the Lacanian notion of *decentration*, of the de-centered subject, aims at: my most intimate feelings can be radically externalized; I can literally ‘laugh and cry through another.’”<sup>41</sup>

In the case of the catastrophic subject supposed to recycle, the tears are real, but the question we can now ask is whose tears they are. In a certain way the contemporary subject supposed to recycle is a subject who knows, who knows that they are implicated, but, by a massive substitution of affect, this subject takes on a broader context and set of actions of others as its innermost reality.

As suggested above, the question is whether the subject is the issue at all. What we find clearly articulated in Žižek, who on this point is almost perfectly continuous with Kant, is that in substitution we can find freedom.

By surrendering my innermost content, including my dreams and anxieties, to the Other, a space opens up in which I am free to breathe: when the Other laughs for me, I am free to take a rest; when the Other is sacrificed for me, I am free to go on living with the awareness that I did atone for my guilt, and so on.<sup>42</sup>

Being free to breathe is of course one of the ultimate values of recycling. To step out of perpetual guilt and to realize some new freedoms, and perhaps to practically address the key problems of the current ecological crisis, we may begin to sense that the subject supposed to recycle needs to give their inner sentiments over to the Other. Given that we have to a certain extent already given control over production and distribution processes to the Other, this is perhaps not so much to ask. But most importantly, we can find freedom not in the retreat into ourselves, but in a renewed giving to the Other of responsibility.

### Responsibility

Such a disbanding the subject supposed to recycle should not be taken as a call to passivity, but rather a refusal to take responsibility for the actions of those who are currently avoiding responsibility by individualizing and

localizing guilt on the shoulders of consumers. Shifting the sense of freedom and guilt of the subject supposed to recycle from center stage is not to deny agency, but rather to shift the locus of this agency from individual subjects, who often in fact have very little agency, towards shifting responsibility, and with this, shifting freedom and guilt towards those who are in fact at the center of economic and political power today. This is crucial because the “subject supposed to recycle” more often than not means the economic system supposed not to recycle, or more forcefully, *the economic system supposed to not recycle*.

Moving from one side to the other, we can bring into focus the disavowed remainder of the current tendency for corporations to outsource corporate social responsibility onto the consuming subject. This outsourcing involves a giving of responsibility that also gives a sense of guilt and of freedom. It also presents itself in the form of a demand, and moreover a demand that the gift must be accepted, as if it were simply and only a kindly gift. But with this demand there is also a threat that if the gift of responsibility is not accepted, then that responsibility will be taken back, and this is perhaps the conclusion of this analysis: that consumers can refuse the offer of freedom and the invitation to perpetually repeated psychological guilt. Such a refusal cannot of course be merely a matter of individual consumers, but of the way in which we conceive of the relative responsibilities of consumers and producers today and in the future.

To come full circle on the question of transference, one might now also ask where the image of the subject supposed to recycle comes

from. What is the source of today’s complacent and catastrophic subjects? To grapple with this, we should recall the way that Freud stresses that the images of transference originate in “anticipatory ideas,” conscious or unconscious. These ideas clearly do not drop out of thin air, and Freud notes that the ideas transferred to the analyst are often real or exaggerated figures from previous experience.

With this we must stress that the ideas that consumers have about their responsibilities are historically embedded and, as I hope has been shown, are deeply implicated in religious and moral ideas, such as guilt and freedom. What we are led to here is that these senses of guilt and freedom can be decentered, even if the work of completely undoing them will be very long indeed and will require repeated and sustained efforts.

Likewise we might begin to see that complacency and catastrophe are not where they seemed to be. It is perhaps ironic, if not perverse, that these are taken on as individual psychological states, when we see all around us the hesitance of corporations to take more than minor responsibility and national governments avoiding serious intervention for fear of the risks that this might present to economic expansion. In such a context we can perhaps now see that the complacency and catastrophe of the subject supposed to recycle are anticipatory ideas transferred from our currently politico-economic climate, which are then taken up by consumers in a process whereby the consuming subject takes on affective states which are little more than the mirror image of the complacency and catastrophe of the Other.

## ENDNOTES

1. How far have we come from the situation described by Weber? Consider where he writes: “The Calvinist God did not demand isolated ‘good works’ from His faithful; rather if salvation were to occur, He required an intensification of good works into a *system*. There was no mention of that genuinely humane cycle, followed by the Catholic, of sin, repentance, penitence, relief, and then further sin. Nor was there any discussion in Calvinism of devices or mechanisms (such as a defined period of punishment) that would balance one’s entire life account and then provide, through the means of grace provided by the church, atone-
- ment for sins. In Calvinism, the practical-ethical action of the average believer lost its planless and unsystematic character and was molded into a consistent, *methodical* organization of his life as a whole.” Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 70–71.
2. Putting things this way might clarify that part of the care of the self that remained to be analysed by Foucault, that is to say, the risks and pathologies of the turn inward that so often accompanies a concern or care for the self. It is this element that Levinas



- helps us disclose when considering how, for example, Foucault concerns himself with the cultivation of the self through questions such as dietetics. For Levinas, of course, the question is not so much the care of self involved when I subject myself to diet. The question, always, is that of the hunger of the Other. See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1984), 95–139, and *History of Sexuality, Volume Three: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1986), 97–144.
3. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1961).
  4. Jacques Derrida, “At this very moment in this work here I am,” in Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, eds., *Re-Reading Levinas* (London: Continuum, 1991), 11–48.
  5. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 163–77. It is also no coincidence that Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism emphasizes the “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” of the commodity form (163), which clearly persist in the underlying theological, metaphysical and moral thematics of the subject supposed to recycle.
  6. Lacan introduced his conception of the subject supposed to know in his eleventh seminar, of 1964. See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar Eleven: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1979).
  7. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre VIII: Le transfert* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).
  8. Sigmund Freud, “An Autobiographical Study,” in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 20 (London: Hogarth Press, 2001), 42; Freud, “An Outline of Psychoanalysis,” *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, 175.
  9. Sigmund Freud, “The Dynamics of Transference,” *Standard Edition*, vol. 12, 100.
  10. *Ibid.*
  11. Lacan, *Seminar Eleven*, 234.
  12. Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 248; Lacan, *Seminar Eleven*, 231.
  13. See Lacan, *Séminaire VIII*.
  14. Lacan, *Seminar Eleven*, 224.
  15. Slavoj Žižek, “The Supposed Subjects of Ideology,” *Critical Inquiry*, 39 (1997): 39–59.
  16. In Levinasian terms complacency is by definition the denial of ethics. In complacency it is hard to see how one could experience the “calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other” (*Totality and Infinity*, 43). In this sense the catastrophic subject might well, it could be noted, be the perfect Levinasian subject.
  17. I thank Mark Dery for this framing. See “‘Always Crashing the Same Car’: A Head-On Collision with the Machinic Phylum,” in Steffen Böhm, Campbell Jones, Chris Land, and Matthew Paterson, eds., *Against Automobility* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 223–39.
  18. We could note two possible strategies of complacency when faced with such images: the first simply does not care, while the second knows that, whatever horrors one sees through the car window, it is somehow being taken care of by the invisible hand of the agents of corporate social responsibility.
  19. Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and its discontents,” *Standard Edition*, vol. 21, 134.
  20. Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as religion,” in *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 288.
  21. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 31–59, also 12.
  22. *Ibid.*, 34
  23. *Ibid.*, 35.
  24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor, 1956).
  25. *Ibid.*, 217.
  26. *Ibid.*, 224.
  27. Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” *Standard Edition*, vol. 18, 7–64.
  28. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, 226.
  29. Renata Salecl, *On Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 2004), 50.
  30. Albert Camus, *The Outsider*, trans. Joseph Laredo (London: Penguin, 2006), 9.
  31. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.
  32. *Ibid.*, 3.
  33. *Ibid.*, 26.
  34. *Ibid.*, 27.
  35. *Ibid.*
  36. *Ibid.*, 27–28. Lacan discusses this example, in what can only be called an “inventive” fashion, in *Seminar Seven: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 108–09.
  37. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 27–28.
  38. Emmanuel Levinas, “Substitution,” in *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 99–130.
  39. Slavoj Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 109.

40. Ibid., 109–11.

41. Ibid, 109.

42. Ibid.

Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy, School of Management, University of  
Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, United Kingdom