

佛光人文學報第四期  
2021年1月 107-143頁  
佛光大學人文學院

# **Caring the Human lives in the Age of Global Pandemic, Covid-19 From Globalization to Localization: Coronavirus and the Excluded**

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## **Abstract**

This paper applies philosophical theories and reflections on global capitalism to a critical reading of the COVID-19 pandemic and global capitalism. It reveals that the key to escaping the prison of fantasy constructed by the symbolic order of capitalism under the attack of the COVID-19 lies in taking sides with the unwanted and infected outcasts. For Žižek, the way to solve the problems of global capitalism is to radically traverse the ideological fantasy by recognizing our unconscious subjection to totalitarian global capitalism. Yet, to make it happen, the subject needs to discover its own repressed negativity in order to identify with the excluded outcasts. Counting on unyielding death drive, the subject can maintain a critical distance from the invitation from the superegoic enjoyment. The critical distance of death drive is to understand and take a step back from the working of

global capitalism. With the death drive, the subject will be able to identify with the disgusting outcasts. It totally embraces the undead outcasts. When the subject itself becomes an excluded undead outcast, the symbolic order exerts no influence on it. When taking the side with the repressed outcasts, the subject feels how violent and oppressive global capitalism is towards the remainder. By applying a Žižekian psychoanalytical approach, I will offer the reader a different perspective on approaching the COVID-19. In doing this, I will outline how the individual can break down the allure of the fantasy constructed by global capitalism's symbolic order and thus make space for a new master.

**Keywords: COVID-19, outcast, ethics of the real, Žižek,**

# **Caring the Human lives in the Age of Global Pandemic, Covid-19 From Globalization to Localization: Coronavirus and the Excluded**

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Like a ruthless killer, the new coronavirus has conquered faster and more powerful than Juila Caesar of Roman empire, much more efficient than any other financial analysts, and much more deadly than any war machines. It penetrates the strictest border and harshest control. It becomes so omnipotent and omniscient that it dominates both the strong and weak. How does it happen? How can this virus spread so stunning fast? To analyze the process and how we can cope with it, I would like to approach it through the lens of psychologists, Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek. I claim that the coronavirus becomes a pandemic because world leaders have embraced global capitalism as the sole measures allowing the virus to spread out fast and claims the innocent lives. I propose the only way that we can reduce the possibility of repeating this similar catastrophe is to traverse and take a stance outside the fantasy of global capitalism.

To better understand the popularity of global capitalism, we need to take a short detour back into history. In 1990, one major historical event helped to bring about the domination of

capitalism in the world. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of Eastern state socialism proved not only a decisive victory for the Western bloc, but also brought about the acceleration of global capitalism. Before 1990, the existence of a powerful Eastern bloc during the Cold War tended to suppress the development of capitalism with the alternative of state socialism. It increased fear among capitalists that their own working class could renounce capitalism and choose socialism. Due to this fear in capitalist states, the Eastern bloc also had an impact on the creation and operation of state-regulated capitalism and social welfare. After 1990, Eastern bloc socialism was viewed as outdated and inappropriate for most states around the world. Almost every country in the world accepted capitalism as the solution to eradicating human poverty while promoting freedom and equality. As the Soviet Union and its allies crumbled in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, capitalism emerged victorious and began to expand globally.

Globalization is interpreted as an increase of cross-border economic interactions and resource flows, producing a qualitative change in the relations between national economies and between nation-states (Baker, *Globalization* 5). Globalization promises not only merchandise trade flow and direct foreign investment, but also cross-border financial investment. All of these suggest greater global accumulation of capital, while enduring the strong pressure of global competition. In the era of global capitalism, local large corporations and banks become comparatively smaller when they enter the world market. To compete with big businesses of other states both domestically and internationally, large banks and companies face “a daily battle for survival, which

prevents attention to long-run considerations and which places a premium on avoiding the short-run costs of taxation and state regulation” (Kotz 69). Therefore, large corporations began shifting to neoliberal theories and policies. Neoliberalism is a concept that involves economic theory and policy. Neoliberals hold that the unregulated capitalist system (free market economy) not just represents the personal freedom of choice, but also reaches the greatest economic goal (high capital accumulation) regarding “efficiency, economic growth, technical progress, and distributional justice” (Kotz 64). In the theory of neoliberalism, the state has a limited role in the economy by defining rights and enforcing contracts, and neoliberal policy mainly refers to decreasing regulations of the welfare state. From an international standpoint, neoliberals ask for free trade of “goods, services, capital, and money” globally (64). For Karatani, neoliberalism has the same economic policy of imperialistic capitalism, which chooses the large corporation over the individual (Karatani 278). Although it may seem like classical liberal policy that demands less state intervention and a much freer market, neoliberalism is in effect imperialistic capitalism in which states intervene to ensure the superiority of their industry in the production and circulation of capital globally.

The problem of neoliberalism lies in these deregulations of the capitalist system, in the promotion of the free market economy, and in the decrease of state intervention and budgeting for social welfare. In neoliberalism, free individual choice puts the individual under the coercion of the contract of the large corporation, in which various working conditions of the individual are often exploited. As capitalism is deregulated, the individual

is further exposed to risks of exploitation. With such intense competition and weak state intervention, local large corporations become multinational corporations, which are companies that have “a substantial proportion of [their] sales, assets, and employees outside [their] home [countries]” (Kotz 67). Because of these basic components, multinational corporations have limited ties to domestic markets of their own home countries for goods and labor. The multinationals will find the most advantageous locations for capital accumulation, which have the lowest minimum wages, reduced taxes, and available land. Due to the free market and global competition, these corporations have negligible social duties and responsibilities to the workers and society. The labor of the individual can be minimized and sacrificed for the private profit of the corporation. When the large corporation finds another place beneficial to capital accumulation, it will move freely from one state to another, focusing only on the place with highest capital accumulation possible. Without sufficient regulation and social welfare policies, the workers first face problems of exploitation in the company; then they have to deal with unemployment, which can trigger social instability. The free flow of capital without restrictions can often cause social injustice since the accumulation of capital flows solely in one direction. The high capital accumulation contributed by employees flows to the already wealthy corporation in the name of boosting the corporation’s global competitiveness. The large multinational corporations take away most of the surplus value generated by the workers without paying much tax or salary, and the wealthiest one percent control the financial flow in the market. However, those in control bear neither attachment nor responsibility to anything since their sole

purpose is capital accumulation. The irresponsible free flow of capital can result in social injustice and financial crisis as well.

As I have argued above, the neoliberal policy helps the rich get richer. In free trade and free market policy, the wealthy entrepreneurs can accelerate their accumulation of capital by paying little or no tax back to the state. And due to the tension of global competition, nations and large companies throughout the world start to embrace neoliberalism as an effective way to become leading countries and companies in the global market. As a result, neoliberal procedures bring about social injustice and world-scale cutthroat competition, thus exacerbating exploitation and oppression. By decreasing state intervention and increasing private control, the individual faces a future of constant crisis.

With less border control to achieve the goal of free market economy and less state intervention, the carriers of the COVID-19 were allowed to spread out throughout the world in February of 2020. The director-general of the World Health Organization even urged global leaders not to close their borders to foreigners travelling from China, “in response to the coronavirus epidemic in that country”<sup>1</sup>. Due to the borderless policy of global capitalism, global leaders assists and accelerates the spread of the COVID-19. Despite the risks of exacerbating the dreadful situation, leaders of world’s leading economic entities, including Donald J. Trump and Xi Jinping, all stress that they should reopen the economy.

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1 Concerning the report of the director-general of the World Health Organization, please check the link below:<https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/who-chief-urges-countries-not-close-borders-foreigners-china>

When serious crises, occur, those who are responsible for running global capitalism — bankers, business owners and politicians — may apologize, step down, or go bankrupt. Either government leaders fail or success in stopping the spread of the virus. Global capitalism, which originally allows COVID-19 to spread, survives these crises unscathed and uninterrupted. If global capitalism is the main factor contributing to the spread of the virus, we then should challenge and change global capitalism.

Yet, the great difficulty of challenging global capitalism stems not from its societal acceptance, but from its advertised and surreptitious allure. Global capitalism triggers, solicits, and satisfies desires of the individual. It promises freedom, equality, and even health. A wide range of methods in economics, political science and even medical science have been meticulously devised to measure whether global capitalism provides freedom, equality, and health. Particularly in the period of the COVID-19, global capitalism promises the only way to bring in multinational investments and cooperation to control, fight, and resist the virus. In practice, the COVID-19 allow the giant multinational tech companies to “amass ever greater power during the pandemic and to consolidate its control over the commanding heights of the global economy”<sup>2</sup>. Global leaders instill financial supports into private sectors. In the US, the American multinational medical company, Johnson & Johnson strikes a deal of more than 1\$ billion with the US government.

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2 About William I. Robinson’ s paper “Global Capitalism Post-pandemic,” please check the link below:<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0306396820951999>

Yet, global capitalism, which puts the subject into a fantasy of wish fulfillment, binds rather than frees the subject. Many believe that those multinational companies, including Bill Gates Foundation, will eventually produce vaccine for every country, not just for the wealthy few<sup>3</sup>. Behind this fantasy of global capitalism as the savior of all mankind lies the very different reality in which desire, as a perpetual sense of lack, gains control. The subject is restricted by desire. Instead of feeling healthy and harmless in the fantasy, the subject embraces a perpetual sense of emptiness, prompting it to pursue endless desire. Rather than living in freedom, equality, and health, the subject must constantly strive to be worthy of its own value. Otherwise, it will be excluded and marginalized by the society as what I term as “the useless and unproductive outcast”<sup>4</sup>. In the case of the COVID-19, everyone must yield himself or herself to the battle of the virus by following the disciplinary control of the authorities concerned even if the measures are wrong, inhuman, and brutal. In the global outbreak of the virus, the system of global capitalism, which promises dreams of maximum profits of consumption, not only encourages but also drives individuals to move from one place to another, which generates issues of contagion clandestinely. Yet, like a recurring pleasant dream that turns into

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3 About the report of Bill Gates Foundation and its contribution, please check the link below:<https://www.forbes.com/sites/elanagross/2020/08/07/gates-foundation-donates-150-million-to-distribute-covid-19-vaccine-to-developing-nations-as-they-struggle-with-accelerating-pandemic/#730f013cb243>

4 My use of the “excluded outcast” refers to the “excluded abject” used by Žižek in Conversation with Žižek. When he talks about the oppression of Jews under the Nazis, he stresses that the “only way to formulate the truth of that society is from a certain extreme partial position” (65). In order to know the most essential atrocity of Nazi Germany, we should “identify with the excluded abject” (65). Following Žižek, Kelsey Wood regards the abject as the excluded outcast. The excluded outcast is “disenfranchised by the hegemonic ideology” (Wood 43).

a nightmare, the system of global capitalism keeps returning to haunt the public with its alluring fantasy. In the case of the COVID-19, the public have been given a fantasy that we can eliminate the virus with the invention of the vaccine while the truth is that the open border and exploitative system obliquely plant the seed of another catastrophic virus or incidents in the future.

To explore a possible way out of the capitalist deadlock, I rely mainly on Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek's works. Žižek is an eminent contemporary thinker who has brought to our attention both the critical need of, and the intense difficulty of, exposing and subverting the system of global capitalism. He argues that capitalism itself establishes the essential backdrop to reality. To resist and challenge global capitalism, we need ethical imagination, "the ethics of the real". In psychoanalysis, Lacan sees the real as the lack and excess in the symbolic order. In Lacan's earlier work, the real appears as a material plenitude that exceeds the symbolic order (*Seminar II* 98). The real is seen as the obstacle which is impossible to be represented in the symbolic order (*Seminar XVII* 143). For Žižek, the real is defined "as not only the symbolic failure but as a positive point of excess, enabled within the symbolic and imaginary realms . . ." (McMillian, 79). In *Lacanian Ethics and the Assumption of Subjectivity*, Neil stresses that the ethics of the real "implies moving beyond signification" and "the ethics which resists comprehension" (Neil 237). Therefore, the ethics of the real can be regarded as an ethical goal that appears through norm-breaking and in finding new directions that involve traumatic restructuring in the symbolic order.

If what is at stake for us today is the way out of the capitalistic plague of fantasies, then we should ask ourselves the question: How do we take a true stance without falling back to mere ideological fantasies or repeating the hegemonic structure we aimed to renounce in the first place? In the section that follows, I would like to discuss how the subject can opt for the ethical event as a substantially radical strategy. As it lives in the plague of ideological fantasies, the subject seems to be powerless to find a truly radical stance against global capitalism. It seems to be nearly impossible for the subject to either reject the invitation of the superegoic *jouissance* or live without following the big Other qua the symbolic order. The mechanism of the symbolic order works almost seamlessly in remaining surreptitious. There is no way to resist the symbolic order of global capitalism but to identify with the excluded undead outcast other, which is an ethical event of the real.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject builds the meaning of its identity on the symbolic order at the time of its entry into language. Prior to the entry into the symbolic order, there is no such thing as a subject. Before the symbolic order, the meaning of its identity is first exposed to the real, which is the chaotic realm where the subject cannot differentiate. To enter the symbolic order, the subject must shift from the real of abyssal chaos to the signification of the symbolic order. Despite the fact that the symbolic order appears to categorize everything from language to law, it does not have stable influence over the subject forever. The signification of the symbolic order follows the Lacanian master signifier / *point de capiton* as the anchoring principle. Although the *point de capiton* has an important

structural role in the production of meaning, it is supported by the subject's fantasy production. Through fantasy, the subject desires the *objet petit a* hoping to fill up the place of "the lacking significance marking the *point de capiton* around which the Other is structured" (Stavrakakis, *Lacan* 62). Without fantasy, the subject cannot see reality and the world as a meaningful and well-structured whole. In Lacan's point, "everything we are allowed to approach by way of reality remains rooted in fantasy" (Lacan, *Seminar XX* 95). As it represses the disruptive real, fantasy supports the *point de capiton* of the symbolic order and gives the symbolic order its consistency (Ragland-Sullivan 16). Therefore, if the subject wants to change the symbolic order, it must start from its constructing principle, which is to look for a new master. As fantasy supports the master signifier, the subject has to start from challenging its own fantasy, which is, as I stress above, ideological fantasy. The subject needs to find the way to traverse ideological fantasy so that the creation of the new master signifier and change of the symbolic order can be possible. The creation of the new master signifier is "a radical rearticulation of the predominant symbolic Order" (Žižek, *Ticklish* 262). Žižek states: "when a new master signifier emerges, the socio-symbolic field is not only displaced, its very structuring principle changes." (262).

In the earlier discussion above, I have indicated that the symbolic order is not an impregnable structure. If the subject can find the way to traverse its ideological fantasy, it will prepare a space for a new master signifier to emerge and bring about a "radical rearticulation of the predominant symbolic order" (Žižek, *Ticklish* 262). In other words, if the subject shifts itself

from the existent popular ideological fantasy of global capitalism to those who are not included as a meaningful subject, then the symbolic order of global capitalism will be forced to adjust itself in order to include the excluded. This move of the subject suggests the ethical gesture of the real, which I mentioned earlier. In the case of global capitalism, when the subject shifts from its ideological fantasy to those who are excluded as useless, a new master signifier related to the excluded will emerge. The socio-symbolic field of the society will stop concentrating on the present ideological fantasy, such as global investment and even the control of the vaccine invention. The predominant influence of global capitalism will be changed, weakened, and even altered once the master signifier has been altered

In today's example, the president of the US, Donald J. Trump can be regarded as one of the cases, demonstrating how the identification with the excluded may change the symbolic order of global capitalism that belittles and even sacrifices the lives of the excluded outcast in the health system for the stable control of power and wealth. In the US, Donald Trump promotes his achievement of economic development and his way of containing COVID-19. He may declare how his not-locking down policy has profited the economy and how freedom of movement is precious to the public. On the other, he can underscore the large sum of investment he puts in large pharmaceutical companies, such as Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. And he has been stressing that the research of the COVID-19 vaccine is underway and will be used to treat people soon. But once the public start to stress and identify with the serious situation of the confirmed cases qua the excluded outcasts. The gesture will expose how

insufficiently Donald Trump and his administration have done, which care merely profits of the large enterprises and economy disregarding the lives of the common people. As people identify with the deceased victims and patients, they will force the Trump administration to adjust its policy and shift its focus away from the profit-orientation to all-lives-matter direction. Although he may act carelessly and keep stressing his own achievement, his recent proclamation of signing health care-related executive orders is an evidence of the chance in his profit-oriented policy since Trump scraps Obamacare soon after he becomes the US president. When the former president, Barack Obama, signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also called as Obamacare, Trump later criticizes Obama's health insurance policy that attempts to include the excluded as "a disaster"<sup>5</sup>.

As the subject enters into the symbolic order, it must sever itself from the real. But the real maintains its influence throughout the subject's life. In global capitalism, the excluded outcasts have to be repressed into the real so that the symbolic order can work properly. If the productive individuals are included as the useful ones that help the symbolic order of global capitalism, the unproductive ones will be the useless and excessive that hinder the working of global capitalism, and thus need to be excluded as the outcasts. The exclusion of the outcasts into the real ensures the stability of the symbolic order.

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5 About President Donald J. Trump's comments on Obamacare, you can find it from the report "Donald Trump On Obamacare On '60 Minutes': 'Everybody's Got To Be Covered' and 'The Government's Gonna Pay For It'" from the link below: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theapothecary/2015/09/28/donald-trump-on-obamacare-on-60-minutes-everybodys-got-to-be-covered-and-the-governments-gonna-pay-for-it/#5d149e9e540e>

Like the repressed real that is repressed in the symbolic order, the repressed identities of the outcasts can range from the unemployed, homeless vagrants to the repressed patients of the COVID-19, such as the deceived patients and doctor in China, Li Wenliang<sup>6</sup>. After the lockdown of the city, the infected patients qua the unwanted outcasts have no global mobility and no means to pursue pleasure. The COVID-19 patients in China are discarded by global capitalism since they become the unprofitable and harmful ones to not only the economic development, but also the reputation of the CCP, Chinese Communist Party. As the Chinese government puts so much effort into maintaining its perfect method of governance, it denies any elements that may damage the reputation of the CCP. Therefore, when Li Wenliang along with other doctors and patients tried to send warning and concerns about COVID-19, they are silenced by the government. The whistleblower, Dr. Li Wenliang, was even forced to write an apology confessing his mistake of creating the rumors of COVID-19. For those who generate inconvenient and negative influence toward the Xi administration, they must be placed as the excluded outcast. Despite being excluded, the outcasts exist within the symbolic order of global capitalism. But as the Chinese general public start to identify with Li Wenliang, they force the Xi administration to change its verdict on Li Wenliang. Because of the public support, Li was changed from the medical doctor who wrongfully spread the rumors to the martyr who bravely warn

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6 About the ophthalmologist from Wuhan Central Hospital, Dr. Li Wenliang, he had issued warning about the possible cases of “Seven severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) like illness with links with the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market” on 30th December, 2019. He was forced to write a formal paper of apology of the disturbing warning about the virus. He contracted the COVID-19 and passed away on the morning of Friday 7th February, 2020. Please check the report from International Journal of Infectious Diseases from the link below: [https://www.ijidonline.com/article/S1201-9712\(20\)30111-9/fulltext](https://www.ijidonline.com/article/S1201-9712(20)30111-9/fulltext)

the public and unselfishly fight the virus. Unfortunately, for the excluded one, Li can only show up as the deceased martyr unable to overthrow the Xi administration. Still, Li points out the deadly problem of the Xi administration for the Chinese.

As they are unwanted and excluded by the symbolic order, the outcasts have minimal ideological fantasies. For the gravely ill patients under quarantine in the lockdown space, they have no other ideological fantasy than to survive the COVID-19. Their existence is the disturbing, horrifying, unclean, and contagious embodiment of the real. It disrupts and corrodes the smooth working of the imagination and symbolic order of any establishment and institution. For the government, the patients of the COVID-19 paralyze the working of the government. For the public, they turn the dreams of meeting wonderful people into nightmares of being infected. Therefore, if we can identify with the excluded outcasts, we will minimize the effect of our ideological fantasies in the symbolic order, and thus have the chance to traverse the ideological fantasies. When we traverse the ideological fantasies, we can possibly move from desire to the death drive and confront the emptiness behind the *objet petit a*.

Concerning the death drive, Freud brings up the concept as a repetitive and self-destructive negativity against reality and the pleasure principle. It is an evil drive that forces us to act against our own interests, compelling us to decline the injunction of the superegoic jouissance. The disruptive and unyielding element of the death drive is analogous to the unknown negativity. With the unknown negativity, the outcasts carry the disruptive and dreadful energy in the symbolic order. Freud senses the

disruptive negative area within the human psyche. He sees this negativity as the death drive. First mentioned in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” the death drive is a repetitive drive of human nature towards death that tries to return to the lifeless state (Freud 46). But Lacan sees the death drive not as a drive back to death. In fact, it has nothing to do with the suicidal drive to disappear. On the contrary, it is the partial negative drive of repetition and oscillation that ignores the pleasure principle and homeostasis (Lacan, *Écrits* 301). The death drive disregards the subject’s interests. It is the element that disturbs the self-protective homeostatic mechanism of proper and tolerable pleasure-seeking (Lacan, *Seminar VII* 87-114). It is “will to destruction... to make a fresh start” (212). In other words, it generates a creative and destructive impulse that questions the existent symbolic order.

Lacan stresses: “it challenges everything that exists” and “create[s] from zero, a will to begin again” (212). It gives the illusion that the slate can be wiped completely clean. Therefore, the death drive works like the real. The death drive responds to a search for a realm beyond the signifying chain of the symbolic order. It is the adamant search for the real. The death drive strives to dissolve the symbolic order which dictates social norms and regulations (Lacan 210-214). When the death drive intervenes, the subject will stick to the void of *objet petit a* as its goal, disregarding the threat of symbolic suicide. With the death drive, the subject encounters its own negativity, representing the “stain or blind spot of jouissance,” which it needs to renounce if it is to “retain a modicum of sanity” (Vighi 102). As the undead outcast is denied its symbolic meaning, it in effect encounters

its “subjective destitution, the collapse of knowledge, a passage through the ‘zero level’ of subjectivity” (102). The “monstrous” negativity involves a momentary “suspension” of the symbolic order (Žižek, *Ticklish Subject* 263-64). With the death drive, the subject arrives at a point where the gap and inconsistency of the symbolic order are revealed. As a result, the undead excluded outcast can be regarded as the closest embodiment to the monstrous negativity in the society.

Compared to the death drive of the outcast, normal people also live under the influence of the death drive. Yet, unlike the outcast, average people do not attempt to disrupt or change the symbolic order with their death drive. Take the normal people who play video games for example. Through these games, players can experience the death drive. However, they can ignore the self-protective homeostatic mechanism of proper and tolerable pleasure-seeking. In games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, players can rob banks and kill police officers. Other games, such as *The Assassins*, allow players to push for a revolution and overthrow a government. Even in the games of Biohazard, the player can be a character to save and recreate a zombie-free world on its own. In these games, players have the death drive to make a fresh start every time they restart the game. Yet, they are allowed to have the creative and destructive impulse that questions the existent symbolic order. Players can dissolve the symbolic order which dictates social norms and regulations. Although the death drive in the game gives players a glimpse of questioning the symbolic order, it does not really enable players to take a step further in reality and make a fresh start. On the contrary, players indulge themselves in the video games and develop infinite ideological

fantasies which disregard the working of the symbolic order in reality.

Unlike the death drive of average people who still live in ideological fantasies, the excluded outcast possesses minimal ideological fantasy or accepted social identity when it is excluded by the symbolic order of global capitalism. With the minimal ideological fantasy, it moves one step closer than the average to the real and void in the symbolic order, the void behind the “splendor of the sublime image” (Zupančič 232). It notices that the promise and dream of freedom, prosperity, and equality in global capitalism are merely the *objet petit a* used to mask the void of global capitalism. The painful and self-destructive death drive of the undead outcast suggests the radical freedom and ethics of the real. Because the real can never be reached by the subject directly, the effort of identifying with the outcast becomes a vanishing point that allows the subject to approach, if not to discover, the real.

The excluded outcast in question is undead in some sense in that it remains alive after it is symbolically dead. The undead outcast, characterized by the death drive, goes through symbolic suicide to become inhuman. To conceptualize inhuman, Žižek draws on Lacan’s notion of lamella. Lamella is the “remainder of the life substance which has escaped the symbolic colonization, the horrible palpitation of the ‘acephal’ drive which persists beyond death, outside the scope of paternal authority, nomadic, with no fixed domicile” (Žižek, *Plague* 89). For Lacan, lamella is like the membrane of the egg that does not belong to the fetus. It is the living organ discarded when the fetus is born to the world.

To give the fetus life, lamella must be thrown away. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan writes about the lamella:

The lamella is something extra-flat, which moves like amoeba. But it can go anywhere. And as it is related ... to what the sexed being loses in sexuality, it is, like amoeba compared to sexed beings, immortal. It survives any division, and any scissiparous operation. And it can run around. . . . This lamella or organ, whose characteristic is not to exist ...life that has need of no organ (197-98).

Like amoeba, the lamella is something extra-flat that does not have biological life, but still moves anywhere. Having no sexuality, the lamella is freed from the cycle of sexual reproduction. It represents an indestructible form of life that has been freed from the signifying domain of the symbolic order. The lamella is an infinitely plastic object that can constantly change its form and jump from one medium to another. It is imperishable and immortal, and can survive any division. To be more precise, it can be something that is first heard as a weird sound, and then shows up as a disgustingly disfigured body like a monster. Therefore, to a certain extent, the unsymbolized lamella can be regarded as the undead outcast in horror fiction, in which the horrible, immortal waking zombies recompose themselves after every defeat. This blind, indestructible persistence of the lamella is Lacan's "death drive."

Concerning the excluded outcasts, I would divide them into two different types: the forced outcasts and the self-determined outcasts. The forced outcasts are the ones who have been excluded or marginalized by the symbolic order. The forced outcasts show the exclusive and oppressive working of the

symbolic order. The outcasts have to be oppressed and excluded so that the society can function smoothly. Different from the forced outcasts, the self-determined outcasts are the ones who are determined to take concrete actions to challenge and change the symbolic order. In the case of the forced outcasts, we can see the walking zombies in the Hollywood movie industry as the forced outcasts. The walking zombies are symbolically discarded to maintain the stable working of the symbolic order while their very return threatens the stability of the symbolic order. The zombies with their revolting human appearance move and walk physically, but have no symbolic meaning at all. They become the forced outcasts wandering aimlessly with no fixed abode because their very existence transgresses the symbolic distinction between life and death. The constant aggression of the zombies' bodies does the terrifying work of destruction, of wiping out the existing order of human law, which opens up a space of new possibility. Due to the contagious virus their bodies carry, the zombies are denied symbolic meaning in the world. The zombies can hardly be brought under control since they survive destruction and contaminate all living organisms. They move from one body to another persistently till the end of human civilization. Once destroyed, the undead remains will shift from one appearance to another to disturb the stable working of the society.

The more radical example of the forced outcast is the condemned Jewish prisoner who survives the massacre in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Here, the forced outcast resembles Giorgio Agamben's idea of the "Muselmann" (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 150). Muselmann is a

derogatory German word for Muslim. This slang word stands for the death camp prisoner on the brink of death. The Muselmann is the prisoner who has given up on everything. The concept of the Muselmann often depicts the Jewish figure at Auschwitz during World War II. The Muselmann is the human being whose humanity is completely erased except for the flow of biological functions. The prisoner of Auschwitz who survives the massacre is deprived of any social meaning by the Nazis. At the concentration camp, the Muselmann does not have social, economic, cultural, or political meaning. It has nothing but its own biological life. It is the “inhuman,” “faceless,” and “living dead” human (Žižek, *Parallax* 112). Worse than an animal, the Muselmann lives in an extremely difficult environment. As the forced outcast, the Muselmann cannot control its own life. Like the undead zombie, it can be shot or executed at any moment. Therefore, life for it is meaningless. The existence of the Muselmann serves as living proof of the most monstrous and threatening undead outcast, one who is nearly impossible to reach.

In the society of global capitalism, the forced outcast can be anyone excluded or persecuted by the symbolic order, such as illegal immigrants in the US, prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, and the Syrian refugees. The forced outcast is a representation of the Muselmann that endures physical death. The forced outcast is trapped, excluded, and condemned because it is harmful, illegal, useless, and even threatening to the d of global capitalism. It consumes no valuable commodity and produces nothing. Like the real, the undead appears as the forced outcast between symbolic and biological existence. It is the “neighbor with whom no empathic relationship is possible” (Žižek, *Parallax* 113). The

inhuman undead defies the circumstances that, in everyday life, global capitalism influences and controls the life and choices of the subject. From the zombie to the illegal immigrant, the icon of the forced outcast suggests the inhuman tension that lies within the human. That inhuman part refers to an uncontrollable freedom because the forced outcast has been expelled and suppressed by the human authority of the big Other. As Žižek has noted:

Lacan pursues all possible versions of this entering the domain “between the two deaths”: not only Antigone after her expulsion, but also Oedipus at Colonnus . . . Sygne . . . their common predicament is that they all found themselves in this domain of the undead, “beyond death and life”, in which the causality of symbolic Fate is suspended. (Žižek, *Ticklish* 265)

When entering into the zone of the “undead,” the subject is longer protected by the big Other. In the domain of the undead, the outcast has no symbolic order that can guarantee the safe outcome of its fate. Whatever the outcast does, it has to bear the consequence and be responsible for its behavior. However, it is not provided with the protection of the symbolic order. Those characters are no longer seen as human beings. Because of the symbolic crime they commit, they are cast away from the human society to safeguard the stability of the symbolic order. Oedipus and Sygne had to be expelled into the undead land beyond life and death in the symbolic order because they were the discomfoting and threatening eyesores in human society. Their mere existence formed a threat to social order and stability and thus had to be excluded. Yet, from a radical sense, the forced outcast becomes the source of freedom outside the symbolic

order. They possess minimal ideological fantasies. The undead outcast has been least affected by the *objet petit a*. Therefore, by identifying with the undead outcast, the subject may perceive the exclusive and oppressive working of the symbolic order.

The undead presents us with a vital force of radical freedom that enables us to reject the invitation of global capitalism to indulge ourselves in desire and drive. Yet, in order to clear the ideological fantasies on the path to changing the symbolic order, the subject needs to adopt an attitude of the self-determined outcast. I claim that the gesture of the self-determined outcast is a passive aggression, which originates from *Bartleby's* radical disengagement. In Melville's novella "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street," Bartleby has a passive response of withdrawal to every request: "I would prefer not to." Bartleby's passive response of withdrawal can be regarded as the self-determined refusal of the big Other and superegoic injunction of global capitalism. His negation is a passive aggressive way of creating a new political space. With this insistence on "I would prefer not to," the subject achieves a true separation from the ideological fantasies of global capitalism. This active and self-determined withdrawal refers to Bartleby's gesture of refusal fill the void with ideological fantasies. It is an aggressive decline that generates an empty space for a new identity and event to take place:

In his refusal of the Master's order, Bartleby does not negate the predicate; rather, he affirms a nonpredicate; he does not say that he doesn't want to do it; he says that he prefers (wants) not to do it. This is how we pass from the politics of "resistance" or "protestation," which parasitizes upon what it negates, to a politics which opens up a new space outside hegemonic position and its negation. (Žižek, *Parallax* 381-82)

At a law office, Bartleby carries out orders from the office manager of the law. When Bartleby says “I would rather not” to the office manager, he gives a stubborn refusal to the command of the law. He refuses to do anything that his superior asks him to do, including ordering lunch. When Bartleby refuses with “I would rather not,” he exerts an active refusal to affirm a non-predicate. In capitalism, one has to work to earn a wage and stay alive. But Bartleby is determined to choose an autonomous space outside his law office by taking a step back away from symbolic order of capitalism. This gesture of active refusal to do anything serves as an act of ongoing protest and temporary liberation from the dominant paradigm of capitalism. Bartleby’s refusal to work as defined by capitalism means Bartleby himself needs to pay a price for his deeds. Bartleby becomes an unproductive body to the symbolic order of capitalism. In the end of the story, he winds up being excluded as a penniless tramp who dies in prison. Although Bartleby starves to death in prison, even refusing to accept food from the guards, he negates the situation that brings about his oppression. His active and determined refusal opens up a whole new vista and freedom.

Unlike the forced outcast who is passively excluded, the self-determined outcast poses a more active and radical threat towards global capitalism qua the symbolic order. We can picture different examples of Bartleby’s gesture in today’s society. We can choose to say “I would rather not” to the popular commercial, such as “We donate one dollar to help fight against sexual exploitation of children if you buy our products.” When there is the political call to defend the democracy, like “defend freedom of speech and protest against the atrocity of IS; support

our democracy,” we can actively refuse the call and say “I would prefer not to.” When some spiritual teaching asks us: “Do you often feel lost and sometimes desperate about your life? Come and rediscover your energy,” we can say “I would prefer not to.” Bartleby’s gesture of refusal takes the subject away from the orchestrated game global capitalism designed for the subject, like the enchanting melody of the Sirens. The utterance of “I would prefer not to” clears a safe passage away from the Siren-like call of the superego and intimidation of the big Other, and waits for the coming of the ethical moment to change the basic coordinates of the symbolic order.

To better understand the change of the identification with the outcast, I will employ the analyst’s discourse to explain how the self-destructive identification will enable the subject to achieve the encounter with the real. Lacan stresses that the analyst’s discourse reveals the way to undermine the attempt at domination and mastery (Lacan, *Seminar XVII* 79). It is a continuous challenge in meaning and closure, in a displacement that never ceases. It brings the split subject (\$) closer to what has been ignored in discourse, *objet petit a*, the cause of the split subject’s desire (205). It is the confrontation with the ignored part (a) that forces the split subject to separate itself from the master signifier, which represents the subject’s symbolic identification. As the analyst’s discourse produces a new master signifier, the analysand moves into a new and less oppressive master’s discourse (205). Before moving into the analyst’s discourse, however, I need to explain some basic ideas.

Lacan developed the theory of four discourses to explain how the political, social, religious and economic ideological fantasies propel desire unconsciously. These four discourses “are nothing other than the signifying articulation, the apparatus whose presence, whose existing status alone dominates and governs anything that at any given moment is capable of emerging as speech” (Lacan, *Seminar XVII* 166). The discourses of the master, university, hysteric, and analyst constitute the relationships between the master signifier (S1), knowledge (S2), split subject (\$), and *objet petit a* (a), as they take turns to occupy the place of agent, Other, product, and truth (*Seminar XX* 21):

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{\textit{agent}} & \longrightarrow & \underline{\textit{other}} \\ \underline{\textit{truth}} & & \underline{\textit{production}} \end{array}$$

Every discourse is dictated by four algebraic symbols in a different place. The symbols remain in the same order, so each different discourse is the effect of rotating the symbols a quarter turn. A discourse begins with someone called the Agent who speaks to the Other with the motivation to communicate with the Truth. The Agent sends the message to the Other, who then generates Product. This is why the Product is found under the Other. Comprehending these four configurations allows an analysis of four important social phenomena: “governing, educating, protesting, and revolutionizing” (*Seminar XVII* 107). To understand how the analyst’s discourse generates psychological change and social change, I have to first discuss the structure of the master’s discourse. The master’s discourse is so powerful that it not only operates in the political field, but also encompasses a

vast array of rules and regulations (99). The master's discourse is the basic one from which the other discourses originate. The master's discourse functions to arrange the social field based on its master signifier (S1), such as the market, globalization, and development. Once the master's discourse has established its supremacy, other discourses are placed under the master's discourse:

$$\frac{S_1}{\cancel{\$}} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

In the master's discourse, the master signifier (S1) occupies the dominant position of the Agent, which represents the split subject ( $\cancel{\$}$ ) for the knowledge (S2). In the signifying process, the knowledge cannot interpret everything and thus generates a surplus, namely, *objet petit a* (a). The master addresses the slave (S2), who learns knowledge in slaving away for the master. As a dictator-like character, the master (S1) demands absolute submission and disregards the knowledge or how the things work as long as its own power is maintained. The master represses all knowledge or recognition of its own finitude ( $\cancel{\$}$ ); in other words, of its own inadequacy. It must show no sign of weakness. The master fails to understand the *objet petit a*, which is the cause of its desire. So the essence of the master's position is to be castrated: it is forbidden a certain jouissance (124). The master carefully hides that it is a being of language and has succumbed to symbolic castration, which indicates the Truth of the master as the split subject ( $\cancel{\$}$ ) (*Seminar XVII* 118). If we take entrepreneurs of global capitalism as master (S1) here and the multinational companies as slave (S2), *objet petit a* (a), occupying the lower

right-hand corner, represents the object of desire or object cause of desire, which can never be attained. The master fails to understand what the outcast wants. The master's discourse shows that the working of dominating power, such as global capitalism, will still generate the incomprehensible *objet petit a*. It proves that all attempts of global capitalism at totalization are impossible.

To explore the meaning of the elusive surplus, we develop the university discourse, in which practices of analysis and investigation are dominant (Lacan, *Seminar XVII* 31). The university discourse can be regarded as a regression of the discourse of the master, as the master's discourse cannot answer the true meaning of the *objet petit a*. The master signifier (S1) regresses into the position of truth allowing a field of knowledge (S2) to occupy the place of the Agent in the university discourse:

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

The knowledge (S2) is supported by a master signifier (S1), which guarantees the consistency of the knowledge (S2). The knowledge (S2) attempts to reach, question and address the mysterious meaning of the *objet petit a* (a). The knowledge (S2) is presented as a tool by the master signifier (S1) to understand the meaning of the *objet petit a*. Yet, the knowledge (S2) can never reach the *objet petit a* (a) since it is the lost object and cause of desire beyond signification. As a result, the product of this university discourse only creates an ever-increasing division of the split subject (\$). The more knowledge one uses to reach for the *objet petit a*, the more one becomes divided between signifiers

and trapped within one's own desire. For example, a constituted knowledge, such as the theory of economic knowledge (S2) is hypothesized, experienced, and guaranteed by the economist of capitalism, Adam Smith (S1) to explain the reason of the surplus outcasts (a). But the result will end in not only ever-increasing knowledge (S2) that fails to include the reason of the surplus outcasts, but also more desire of the split subject (§), who fails and desires to understand the surplus outcasts.

As the university discourse fails to explain the *objet petit a*, the hysteric's discourse appears to express a dissatisfied inquiry (Lacan, *Seminar XVII* 39). It is a clockwise quarter move of the discourse of the master. In this discourse, the divided subject (§) takes up the position of the Agent, supported by the truth of its *objet petit a* (a):

$$\frac{\S}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

The split subject, supported by the *objet petit a*, occupies the dominant position and addresses the master signifier (S1), calling it into question. Unlike the university discourse that follows directions from the master signifier, the hysteric confronts the master and questions the master to the point where the hysteric finds the master's knowledge lacking (*Seminar XVII* 23). As the hysteric is supported by the *objet petit a*, it disproves any knowledge that the master signifier (S1) produces. The hysteric's discourse is driven by the *objet petit a* (a) to know the master signifier (S1) (36). The hysteric does not believe the master signifier to be capable of guaranteeing the system of knowledge. The hysteric's discourse is the exact opposite of the master's

signifier, in which the hysteric starts to challenge the power of the master signifier (S1) with the question: “*Che vuoi?*” (*Ecrits* 312). The hysteric subject (\$) repeatedly asks the master signifier (S1) the question: Why am I what you are saying that I am? No matter how hard the split subject drives the master signifier (S1) to answer the questions, the master signifier (S1) can only produce an ever-growing system of knowledge (S2), which can never answer the questions of the split subject.

In the case of global capitalism, the non-governmental organization represents the surplus outcast to question and challenge the entrepreneurs of multinational corporations. The NGO (\$) can never feel satisfied in the answer given by the companies since it is supported by the surplus labor (a). The process of the hysteric’s discourse will only produce an ever-growing system of knowledge (S2) explaining the working of global capitalism. Those entrepreneurs can give answers that explain the emergence of the surplus outcast. But they can never truly generate a satisfying system that can cope with or improve the situation of the outcast. The hysteric’s discourse exposes the inconsistency and incompetence of the master signifier. In other words, global capitalism embraced by the multinational companies does not bring us freedom and happiness since it results in the excluded outcast. Hence, to solve the problem, we need another critical discourse to reflect on the problems caused by global capitalism.

The analyst’s discourse is the inverse of the master’s discourse. It subverts the master signifier (S1) by replacing it with objet petit a (a), which is now an empty place where nothing

is presented. It stands for the appearance of “revolutionary-emancipatory subjectivity” (Žižek, *Parallax* 298). The graph of the analyst’s discourse figures the social bond in the scene of the psychoanalytic clinic:

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

In this discourse, the analyst takes up the Agent of the *objet petit a* (a) (*Seminar XVII* 42), supported by the Truth of the knowledge (S2) that the analysand presents to him. The analyst needs to, in the course of the treatment, become the cause of the analysand’s desire (41). The analyst interrogates the analysand (\$), right at those points where the subject splits between the conscious and the unconscious shows through, such as dreams, slips of the tongue, unconscious mistakes, and unintentional acts (*Seminar XVII* 172-73). Hoping to understand its own problems, the analysand attempts to answer the analyst / *objet petit a* with association. The analyst prompts the analysand into laborious association that eventually generates a new master signifier (S2). The split subject (\$) / analysand embraces the laborious association and takes up a position to assume its own alienation and desire and, based on this assumption, parts from the old master signifier to form relations with other signifiers, and produces its own new master signifier. The analyst’s discourse gives the most effective means of promoting psychological change by placing in the dominant position of the sender’s message that *objet petit a* (a) belonging to the receiver of the message,— precisely what has been excluded from symbolization (*Seminar XVII* 48) and suppressed by the master’s discourse. In this way, the analyst’s discourse calls the

analysand to recognize, acknowledge, identify, and cope with the excluded portion of being (a), to the extent of producing a new master signifier (S1) in response to it. The goal of analysis is to help the patient encounter, acknowledge, and identify with this excluded part of its being, the *objet petit a* (a). The identification will enable the subject to get rid of the old master signifier which constructs the unconscious ideological fantasies of the subject (Žižek, *Parallax* 298).

If we see this from today's point of view, we will come to realize that getting rid of the old master signifier means abandoning the "superego injunction to enjoy" in global capitalism (Žižek, *Parallax* 299). Global capitalism is not the inverse structure of the analyst's discourse. It resembles the analyst's discourse, which is the "discourse of perversion" (303):

...the "agent" of the social link today is a, a surplus-enjoyment, the superego injunction to enjoy that permeates our discourse; this injunction addresses \$ (the divided subject), who is put to work in order to live up to this injunction. If ever there was a superego injunction, it is the famous Oriental wisdom: "Don't think, just do it!" The "truth" of this social link is S2, scientific-expert knowledge in its different guises, and the goal is to generate S1, the self-mastery of the subject — that is, to enable the subject to "cope with" the stress of the call to enjoyment (through self-help manuals) ...(299)

In global capitalism, the Agent of *objet petit a* (a) is a pervert that functions as the superego injunction to enjoy. Supported by scientific-expert knowledge, the superegoic pervert takes up the place of the object-instrument of the other's desire and speaks to the split subject (\$), who does not know what it wants.

The superegoic obscene father qua the pervert (a) knows it for the split subject. In the pervert's discourse, the split subject is driven to live up to the injunction of the superego. The Truth that supports the superego is professional, scientific knowledge (S2), and the aim of this discourse is to create a new master signifier (S1), the "self-mastery of the subject" (299). But this new master signifier only helps the subject to deal with the pressure of the call to enjoyment in capitalism. For instance, under the popular slogan of LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability), people are encouraged to make their lives better. So they ask for advice from experts and specialists, who own scientific-expert knowledge. After receiving advice, the people work hard, such as by eating healthy diets, going to gyms and so on, in order to live up to the injunction of LOHAS. The ultimate goal of LOHAS is to generate a self-mastery of the public that will allow them to deal with the stressful challenges and competition in the society of global capitalism.

Different from the pervert's discourse of the superego, the analyst (a) qua the Agent reduces itself to the void which provokes the split subject into confronting the truth of its own desire. In global capitalism, the identification and confrontation with the *objet petit a* reveal not only the truth of one's own desire, but also the embodiment of the surplus labor qua the excluded other.

The end of the analyst's treatment suggests that the way out of the ideological fantasies of the superego in global capitalism lies in identifying with the excluded and surplus other. By identifying with the *objet petit a* (a), the analysand

can successfully traverse the unconscious ideological fantasies and forsake the call of the superego qua the master signifier. It acknowledges loss (the outcast) as the constitutive part of human subjectivity. It accepts the position of subjective destitution. By acknowledging, recognizing, and identifying with the excluded, we can isolate and get rid of the superego that asks the subject to live up to the injunction of enjoyment in global capitalism. Through this identification, we can bring global capitalism into relation with other signifiers to produce a new master signifier.

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# 在新冠全球流行病 年代裡關懷全球與 在地人類生命： 新冠病毒與被摒棄者

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## 摘要

本文運用哲學理論反思全球資本主義與全球大流行的新冠病毒。本文認為，新冠之所以全球流行，死傷人數不斷創新高，正是因為全球資本主義所帶來的人流全球暢行無阻，而我們都一直活在全球資本主義所建構的全球化，貨出去，人進來，發大財的暢行美夢，導致許多領導人與國民一切往前／錢看，也使許多國家不願反思新冠發生的起源、原因與擴散，最終使全世界的人類社會不斷接力發燒、生病、死亡。因此在新冠疫情流行的時代，筆者認為要避免疫情擴大的方式首先在於擺脫資本主義建構出的幻想牢籠，同一時間要接受、關懷並正視、認同被新冠病毒感染的被摒棄者，而非以鴛鴦心態視而不見染疫者，或者更糟的是將被隔離的染疫者，視為與病毒同類棄之不顧，本文認為如此才能有效反思控制死傷與抑制疫情的擴大。對理論家紀傑克而言，主體唯有意識到自己壓抑的負面性進而認同被隔離的被摒棄者，方能了解到我們無意識的順從全球資本主義運作方式，進而激進的跨越自己安逸的意識形態幻想。當我們認同、關懷，甚至把自己也當成被摒棄的染疫者在思考時，我們才有可能達到真實界的倫理學，在以利益為依歸、賺錢比人命重要的全球資本主義思緒之外，找到新的有效防疫思考模式。

**關鍵字：**新冠狀病毒，被摒棄者，真實界的倫理學，紀傑克