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Stranger in Her Own House: Psychoanalysis and the Constitution of the Subject in the Women's Diaries of Jerebtsova, De Jesus and Bellamy

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Table of Contents

Declaration of honor	4
Acknowledgements	5
Abstract.....	6
Introduction	7
1. <i>Ant in a Glass Jar</i> by Polina Jerebtsova: the Impossible Subject.	14
2. <i>Child of the Dark</i> by Carolina Maria de Jesus: Alienation of a Racialized Subject.....	40
3. <i>The Buddhist</i> by Dodie Bellamy: Subject as a Self-Aware Product of Late Capitalism Fighting for Nonbelonging.....	69
Conclusion	95
Bibliography.....	97

Declaration of honor

I declare that this thesis is of my own authorship and has not been previously used in any other course or curricular unit, in this or another institution. References to other authors (statements, ideas, thoughts) scrupulously respect the rules of attribution, and are duly indicated in the text and bibliographical references, in accordance with the referencing rules. I am aware that the practice of plagiarism and self-plagiarism constitutes an academic offense.

I further declare that I did not use generative artificial intelligence tools (chatbots based on large language models) to carry out any part(s) of this thesis.

Porto, May 20, 2024

Aleksandra Kovaleva

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Abstract

This study investigates the constitution of the subject in female diaries through the analysis of three distinct works: *Ant in a Glass Jar* by Polina Jerebtsova, *Child of the Dark* by Carolina Maria de Jesus and *The Buddhist* by Dodie Bellamy. The primary objective is to explore how women represent themselves in their diaries and to identify common strategies and approaches in their self-portrayal. Employing Lacanian psychoanalysis and theories from other psychoanalytic thinkers, this project shows that the female subjects in these diaries are constituted within a paradigm of liminal nonbelonging. This concept reflects how they are, at once, partially included and excluded from collective identity. These women inhabit a borderline space between inside and outside, which allows them to maintain an emotional connection with their communities while also holding a critical and estranged perspective in relation to them. This dual positioning enables them to critique both societal norms and their own identities. The findings highlight the complex dynamics of self-representation in female diaries and offer new insights into the psychoanalytic understanding of female subjectivity.

Key words: diaries, psychoanalysis, subjectivity, Polina Jerebtsova, Carolina Maria de Jesus, Dodie Bellamy

Introduction

I left Russia two years ago, which was the easiest, toughest and most impactful decision I made in my life. Although I had a return ticket to show at passport control so that they would let me out, I knew for sure that I would cancel it as soon as I landed in Armenia. There was no way back for me. After a month in exile, I started to keep a diary of sorts – a channel on Telegram messenger with forty odd followers. My intention was to document things happening both inside and outside myself. Suddenly, my life turned into a real life instance of the “May you live in interesting times” curse, so it seemed important to keep tabs on what was happening. Soon enough, I deleted the channel because I felt threatened by my own speech. I couldn’t write about my thoughts regarding the political situation and ended up censoring myself. Even when I dared to write something political, I would delete it a few hours later. It was scary that anyone back home could denounce me and turn me into a criminal for my words alone.

That experience made me wonder what a diary is, how it straddles the public and the private and how accurately it represents the subject writing it. It turned out to be much more complex than sincere self-observation. French diary researcher Philippe Lejeune notes that “[t]he diary, like writing itself, was born of the needs of commerce and administration.” (Lejeune, 2009, p. 51). Thus, the primary objective of the diary was to control things and events. Thanks to her diary, a diarist could be in charge of whatever she needed to. Lejeune goes on: “To keep an account... is a way of exercising a modicum of power, however limited.” (ibid). This idea is extremely pertinent, especially when we speak about female diarists, including the authors discussed in this work: De Jesus in a 1950s Brazilian favela, Jerebtsova in the war-torn Chechen Republic of 1990s and Bellamy in the safe US middle class of 2010s. Even though at the first glance, they seem to have nothing in common, all three of them testify that they gained greater agency by writing their diaries.

Polina Jerebtsova witnessed two Russo-Chechen wars and has been documenting them for ten years, starting when she was nine. Jerebtsova perceived her diary as both

a weapon and a survival kit, keeping it even if it put her at risk. Carolina Maria de Jesus was a Black Brazilian diarist who captured her daily struggle with racism and misery and moved out from the favela thanks to her writing. She used her diary to register daily injustice and fight against it. Dodie Bellamy is a writer and a college professor whose book is based on her blog devoted to her breakup with a man she loved. She used it to showcase her weakness and turned it into something empowering. What unites these women is the fact that they kept their diaries during negative periods of their lives. They wrote about themselves and the world surrounding them to assert their existence, to capture how they saw reality and how they saw themselves.

Crucially, the way they construct subjectivity is different from how men do it. If we look at the work of Karl Ove Knausgård, whose six-volume autofiction Anna Kornbluh discusses in *The Immediacy of Late Capitalism*, we notice that he has some strong opinions about our topic. He writes: “Fictional writing has no value.” (Knausgaard apud Kornbluh, 2023). Just like that, he denies what is colloquially referred to as literature: he has no qualms voicing his controversial opinion as if it were a universal truth. Fiction writing has no value, period. Knausgaard has no problem saying: “Over recent years I had increasingly lost faith in literature.” (ibid.). Or even: “The only genres I saw value in... were diaries and essays, the types of literature that... consisted of a voice, the voice of your own personality.” (ibid.). Knausgaard sees value only in true stories that are not “made up”: only truth deserves our attention. However, he wants the truth to be told with one voice (the narrator’s) which makes the whole notion of truth questionable: one always chooses what to reveal and what to conceal. Knausgaard’s masculine approach to the constitution of the subject is centered on a kind of voice which Byung-Chul Han describes as coming “from *some other place*, from the *outside*, from the *other*”¹ (Han, 2018, p. 63). Knausgaard and the male subject he constitutes look at the world from the outside, maintaining the posture of a creator who makes up the world by an act of speech. By contrast, the female subject is inside the world, she hears the voices of the other and lives under its gaze. The male subject gravitates

¹ Translation from Portuguese: “A voz de *uma outra parte*, de *fora*, de *outro*”. Here and further in the texts, translations in footnotes are mine if the translator is not specified.

towards universality. He is the model subject while the woman doesn't exist, as famously argued by Lacan. There is no universal women's experience, no universal women's position; women are unlikely to publish their six-volume autofiction in one inoperable volume, as Knausgaard did. There is nothing totalizing about their life writing, experience, and subjects. That makes it especially interesting to look into how they describe the process of subject formation.

Diary literature is usually perceived as a "feminine genre" because of the famous division between the public and the private, the former traditionally deemed to be the domain of men and the latter of women. As stated by Christa Hämmerle:

[T]he polarization of gender roles in the bourgeois era led to the fixation of women and girls in the private, non-public sphere. Women's ostensibly natural characteristics were located in the domains of reproduction, and associated with emotionality and the prosaic concerns of everyday life, while more publicly relevant qualities such as rationality and objectivity were ascribed to the male sex. (Hämmerle, 2009, p. 144).

Everything done by men used to be traditionally ascribed more importance and value. Interestingly, the genres of autobiography and diary were perceived as opposites because autobiography gained masculine connotations. As noted by Deborah Martinson: "Autobiography traditionally was seen as a masculine genre designed to record the public lives of important men." (Martinson, 2003, p. 4). Autobiography has the reputation of a more highbrow genre: when composing one, the author looks back at their life, making up a narrative and building a hierarchy. By contrast, diaries lack any hierarchy; "their cyclical, repetitive and cumulative structure, their capturing of a series of 'present moments'... their unfinishedness" (Hogan, 1991, p. 98) make "diaries embody 'life as *process*, not *product*'." (ibid.). Any finality is alien to a diarist as she is in the process of becoming which is tantamount to life itself; things never settle nor are they meant to. As Sylvia Plath points out in her famous diary: "...people 'find themselves'. But the very content that comes from finding yourself is overshadowed by the knowledge that by doing so you are admitting you are... a special kind of grotesque." (Plath, 2000). Life goes on, and so does the diary.

So, the diaristic form, perceived as fragmented, non-hierarchized and spontaneous, has a certain manner of representing the subject which differs from the masculine one. As Mary G. Mason notes: “the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of the female self is linked to the identification with some ‘other’.” (Mason, 1988, p. 22). In her diary, Plath returns to the idea that she is not like others several times: “I not being them, could try to be more like them” (Plath, 2000) or “[r]ead widely of other experiences in thought and action – stretch to others even though it hurts” (ibid). The idea of the subject as emerging through interaction with the other is one of the touchstones of psychoanalysis, which justifies the usage of a psychoanalytic lens when considering the topic of subject formation in feminine diaries.

Joan Copjec explains the role of the other in the formation of the female subject when discussing the movie *The Wind Will Carry Us* by Abbas Kiarostami:

Zeynab [the heroine] requires an intervention, the presence of others as such, in order to emerge from... the gerundive form of her impoverished existence, as a subject. In the absence of this intervention she remains something less than that... Sunk in darkness, Zeynab remains invisible not only to the others, but also to her self. She does not exist merely for herself but for nobody. In order to experience herself as a subject, she requires an outer dimension, a visibility outside herself. (Copjec, 2006, p. 25, 28).

To be seen by the other means to gain access to oneself. The ability to relate to the other helps the female subject gain “the sentiment of self” (ibid., p. 27). So, the other allows the subject to grasp herself, and serves as a sort of mediator between the subject and herself.

The role of the other in women’s diaries is significant. On the one hand, “women continued to turn to the diary as one place where they were permitted, indeed encouraged to indulge full ‘self-centeredness’” (Culley, 1985, p. 4). On the other hand, they always expected their diary to be read by someone else: their father, husband or descendants. Consequently, women constructed their subject the way they agreed to

be seen by the other: "...pressure from male audience who wield various kinds of power urges women writers to shape fictional selves" (Martinson, 2003, p. 9). The subject of a feminine diary emerges both from the interaction with the other and through her conscious decision to portray herself in a certain way because women always know that they are being looked at.

This concept of the gaze is important both for psychoanalysis and for women. To a woman, everything always revolves around the gaze: a male gaze looking at her, her gaze looking in the mirror to reassure that she looks good under his gaze so that she herself can serve as a quality mirror for a man. As Brodzki and Schenk note:

[The gaze] has historically served to imprison femininity: for a woman to be reassured of her "looks" is to know that she will be looked at. But beyond a woman's (always mediated) subjective relationship to her hand mirror is a range of ways in which she herself serves as a mirror. (Brodsky & Schenk, 1988, p. 7).

They also reference Virginia Woolf who argued that "women are 'looking glasses' themselves, 'reflecting the figure of man at twice natural size'" (ibid). This system of reciprocal gazes makes up a complex network in which the female gaze gets lost. And I believe that diaries help keep the gaze alive and help it become a "shape-changer" as Copjec described it.

The notion of self (or the subject) being constructed is common for the diary studies, which is also important for this work. According to Peter Heehs: "the self is not a substance but a construct... not something to reflect on but to be, to express, to affirm." (Heehs, 2013, p. 227). The subject doesn't exist without the other, whether an existing or an imaginary one. It has to be expressed – and expression is a sort of externalization, exposure to the other. Heehs goes on: "The old alchemical dream was changing base metals into gold. The new alchemical dream is: changing one's personality – remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one's very *self*." (Wolfe apud Heehs, 2013, p. 230–231). The subject can be constructed and reconstructed, and the diary is a tool that helps in this process. Quoting Kathryn Carter: "construction

of the self does not simply happen *in* the diary but rather *through* the diary” (Carter, 2020, p. 48).

Heehs states, taking a cue from Virginia Woolf, that “[i]n this act of self-creation, imagination plays a crucial role: ‘You can’t become what you can’t imagine becoming,’” Woolf said, ‘You imagine who you are’” (Heehs, 2013, p. 232). If we put it in psychoanalytical terms: the Imaginary structures the Symbolic; the image of the subject organizes the written text of a diary, the book.

Summing up what is important regarding women’s diaries for this work, one can say that diaries are a source of power for their authors. They endow the diarists with a sensation of control and strength. The author decides how to present herself in the diary; what she lets the reader see and what remains obscure. Writing a diary is a way to gain agency for the one who writes, to be in charge of her life and her image because the diary always presupposes some audience: “friend, lover, mother, God, a future self...” (Martinson, 2003, p. 10). A diary presupposes an interaction with the other, even if it is an imaginary other. So, the subject of the diary is potent and aware of the image that she creates. At the same time, the subject is aware of her vulnerability when exposed to the other; she is oppressed and aware of this fact as well: “Women, automatically outside the symbolic order, are vulnerable to the power of masculine erotics and economics. The outside place of women inflicts their texts.” (ibid., p. 8).

To understand how the constitution of the subjects happens, I will be using a psychoanalytical frame of reference. I rely on Jacques Lacan for key concepts like *jouissance*, mirror stage, the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, as well as when talking about the gaze.

I will also be quoting contemporary thinkers who adhere to the Lacanian approach. In particular, I turn to Slavoj Žižek when discussing the questions of racism and war in the chapter devoted to the diary of Jerebtsova and the Russo-Chechen wars. Alenka Zupančič also features prominently in that chapter. My use of theory is accompanied by historical documents of the period, both in textual and multimedia form (podcasts and YouTube videos).

Discussion of the diary by De Jesus relies on Black Brazilian researchers Djamila Ribeiro who contributed significantly to the popularization of the concept of place of speech (*lugar de fala*) and Grada Kilomba who is known for her academic works on decolonization and artistic performance. Research of Elzira Divina Perpétua and the dissertation by Leticia Guimarães Martins help investigate how De Jesus's diary was edited and its influence that process had on the subject constructed through the text.

Works by Todd McGowan are used to talk both about racism and the racist fantasy (in the chapter about Jerebtsova's diary), life in late capitalism, the commodification of love and the constant pursuit of pleasure in the chapter about *The Buddhist* by Dodie Bellamy. McGowan's emphasis on the importance of nonbelonging made me think about the condition of liminal nonbelonging that became the leitmotif of the work. In the third chapter, McGowan's theory is accompanied by that of Mari Ruti who devoted significant attention to the research of love in late capitalism. This chapter also borrows a lot from the latest book of Anna Kornbluh to discuss late capitalism.

I couldn't help but mention Pushkin a couple of times. A poet, playwright, the creator of contemporary Russian language – if you scratch any Russian, you will find a portrait of Pushkin engraved on their heart, regardless of their personal feelings toward him. So, his life and work seemed to be quite illustrative for some fragments of this work.

All of these materials helped me trace the strategies that Jerebtsova, De Jesus, and Bellamy chose to constitute their personas in their diaries. I will be referring to them by their surnames when I speak about the author and by their names when the heroines are discussed. My main argument will be that the subject can neither fully belong nor fail to belong completely. She dwells in the state of liminal nonbelonging which makes it possible for her to both be involved in her life and to maintain an estranged perspective which allows her to analyze herself, the other and the whole Symbolic order.

1. *Ant in a Glass Jar* by Polina Jerebtsova: the Impossible Subject.

On June 23, 1994, a nine-year old girl from Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic, wrote in her diary: “I brought home an ant. It lives in a glass jar; there is some dirt in it. I read in a book that ants can build beautiful cities and decided to see how they do it. Let it build a city in a jar!”² (Jerebtsova, 2014). Exactly the kind of thing that would tickle the imagination of a nine-year old. Curiously, twenty years later, a friend of mine from Saint Petersburg bought an ant farm for her son to witness the exact same thing. If we return to the girl in Grozny and her diary, we might notice that four months after the ant entry, on October 19, she wrote about a very different topic:

The adults say tanks are approaching the town. Russians. Yeltsin declared war on us, damn him!

My grandfather is in hospital. I am afraid when they bomb us. My mother and I sell newspapers. They aren’t selling. Once I asked for alms with my mom, another time I did it alone. It is not a shame to beg, it is a shame to look at people. We used that money to buy some medications.³ (Jerebtsova, 2014).

For a decade, the girl chronicled her life in a diary, intimately portraying the two Chechen wars from her perspective. She witnessed and detailed it all: the decimated buildings of Grozny, the bone-chilling winters endured in windowless, heatless houses, the harrowing scenes of people and even animals succumbing to starvation (her silly cats wouldn’t eat pickled tomatoes – the only food available in the ravaged city) and her own shrapnel injury⁴. A few pages later, Zherebtsova captured how Russian

² Translation from Russian: “Я принесла муравья. Он живет в стеклянной банке: там есть земля. Я читала в книжке, что муравьи строят красивые города, и решила посмотреть как. Пусть в банке построят!”

³ Translation from Russian: “Взрослые говорят, что на город идут танки. Русские. Ельцин объявил нам войну, чтоб ему!

Дедушка в больнице. Я боюсь, когда бомбят. Я и мама продаем газеты. Они плохо продаются. Один раз я даже просила милостыню с мамой, один раз сама. Руку протягивать не стыдно, стыдно смотреть на людей. Купили лекарства на эти деньги”.

⁴ The (im)possibility of all the evil caused by the federals is the leitmotif of the book: “Nobody believes that Russians will bomb us. They are people after all.” (Jerebtsova, 2014). As Steven Miller states: “An

soldiers changed their minds about shooting her and her mother. She recounted incidents of schoolyard bullying, where Chechen children targeted her because of her "Russian name" and teachers looked away. Amidst those entries, she painted vivid portraits of her friends and foes, those who helped her and did her harm.

That girl's name is Polina Jerebtsova, the daughter of a Chechen father and a "Russian" mother – who, in actuality, hailed from Ukraine – a detail of minor significance for those who sought an easy way to categorize people into those who did belong from those who didn't. Polina, with her common Slavic name and surname, obviously stood out and was perceived as an outlier or even an enemy by the people of her native land. She also didn't have a male relative to safeguard her which was (and continues to be) essential in the Chechen Republic. Her mother divorced her father when she was pregnant and therefore gave the child her own surname. Thus, the absence of a man was apparent. As Francine Banner observes it in her study of beauty pageants in the post-war Chechen Republic, "if women are not 'protected' by male relatives, they are helpless and of lesser status within the community" (Banner, 2009, p. 40). During the war, one had to protect oneself against a variety of things, from bride kidnapping to the danger of eviction from one's own apartment (during the Russo-Chechen wars, Chechens kicked Russians out of their apartments in Grozny).

To protect herself, Polina used some astute tricks (calling herself Fatima or lying that she had an uncle), imitated the appearance of Muslim women, openly fought for justice and... she wrote her diary. It became a sort of survival kit for her. She threatened people saying she would mention them in her diary when they did her harm:

I will make you famous by means of my diary! I will remember this day! And your words! When you will have forgotten about them, you will read about

event becomes traumatic not because it *did* happen but rather because it *could* happen. War constitutes a predicament in which, even after an event has happened, we do not cease to be shocked at its possibility. The pure possibility that adheres to the often horrible actuality of an event is ultimately what overwhelms our psychic defenses". (Miller, 2014, p. 23). People of war-time Grozny live under the circumstances that they cannot imagine as possible even being surrounded by the horrible reality. Therefore, the brief portrayal of the city may seem to be exaggeratedly terrifying.

your behavior in a book! I will make you immortal, you scoundrel!⁵ (Jerebtsova, 2014)

Surprisingly, it did help, but scaring people off was not the only help that the diary could offer. It helped her to survive mentally, as well as to build and preserve her identity and become a subject in the psychoanalytical sense. In her diary, Polina begins to constitute herself as a subject from the outset, at the age of nine, before the war begins. We can see her distinguish herself from others almost immediately – and we can feel how painful the process is. At the age of nine, Polina desperately wanted to be a snowflake at a New Year party because “all the girls in the class are snowflakes”⁶ (Jerebtsova, 2014). However, she ended up dressing as Little Red Riding Hood. She wanted to belong badly but felt that she didn't and there was no reason why. Polina rebelled against it but could not traverse the demarcating line between the self and the other. At the age of nine, Polina does what Todd McGowan sees as the way to combat the racism inhabiting our unconscious (McGowan, 2022). She embraces her nonbelonging, which people tend to ascribe to the racial other. It doesn't prevent her from having a desire to belong, but she accepts the impossibility of that desire to ever come true. It becomes evident to her that nonbelonging is a common human condition which no one can escape. There is no reason for other girls to be dressed up as snowflakes: the costumes were chosen randomly or by chance. In the nineties, children of the Post-Soviet region used to wear New Year costumes that their parents were able to sew. It just so happened that Polina's mother could make a New Year costume out of an old red skirt of hers. Polina's unconscious received a message about her nonbelonging, about its naturalness and that nonbelonging is determined by random factors. In a sense, nonbelonging became the source of her *jouissance*⁷.

⁵ Translation from Russian: “Я прославлю тебя на века при помощи своего дневника. Я запомню этот день! Твои слова! Когда ты о них позабудешь, то прочтешь о своем поведении в книге! Я сделаю тебя бессмертной, негодяйка!”

⁶ Translation from Russian: “Все девочки в классе – снежинки!”

⁷ We can think of *jouissance* as “a pleasure and pain... presented as a single packet to take or leave” (Lacan, 1997, p. 189). It has transgressive character: a subject has so much pleasure that at some point it gets painful (or vice versa: the pain starts to feel good). We can also rely on the definition of Néstor Braunstein: “The common meaning makes *jouissance* and pleasure synonymous; the psychoanalytic meaning confronts them, making *jouissance* now an excess intolerable to pleasure, now a manifestation

Polina doesn't belong and the condition of being an outlier makes her both enjoy and suffer. The feeling of nonbelonging gains volume when Polina's friend steals a sticker album from her. Polina cries because now she "has neither her album nor her friend"⁸ (Jerebtsova, 2014). When another friend of hers advises Polina to keep the "lost friend's" dictionary that Polina has at home, she refuses to do so. Polina writes: "If she is like that, I am not like that"⁹ (Jerebtsova, 2014). She starts to feel the pain of divergence; a loss that cannot be overcome. As Lacan stated, "The subject's desire can only be confirmed... through a competition, through an absolute rivalry with the other, in view of the object towards which it is directed" (Lacan, 1991, p. 170). The object here is not the sticker album – not anymore. It is the desire to act morally. From now on, this rupture will be present in Polina's life. She will compete with others for acting and being moral. Sometimes Polina will lose that fight – for instance, when she broke the promise that she had made to her mother and looted some winter boots for herself. However, many times, Polina will be a victor: she stands up for herself, helps others and denounces people trying to do unjust things. It is not enough for her to do what she deems to be moral. In order for her to pursue her desire, there should be other people who fail to correspond to her standards of moral behavior (even if being moral doesn't belong to their desires and, therefore, they don't partake in this competition – at least, not consciously). This (imaginary) competition is the starting point of Polina's subjectivity. She is "not like that", which means that she not only refuses to steal the dictionary even for revenge purposes (i.e. acts morally), but also doesn't belong to the collectivity of her ex-friend and her family who think stealing is acceptable. Polina discovers that she fails to belong even to people whom she thought to be of her circle.

Polina's subjectivity also originates from her prewar childhood experience of killing fish in a tank, which can be regarded as an act of freedom:

of the body closer to extreme tension, to pain and suffering. And one must choose: either one or the other". (Braunstein, 2020, p. 14).

⁸ Translation from Russian: "У меня теперь нет альбома и нет подруги".

⁹ Translation from Russian: "Если она такая, то я не такая".

...there were two glasses on the table. One with fish food, the other with mouse poison. I knew which of them contained poison. But I was curious, what would happen if I fed fish with it. I gave them a little. They died in the tank. I was afraid to look at them. They became dead, but they had been alive.¹⁰ (Jerebtsova, 2014).

Polina didn't mean to kill fish although she knew the word "poison". She was just curious about the effect it could produce on the fish. She writes that she knew which of the glasses had poison in it – therefore, we understand that it was her decision not to use the one with the fish food. Her intention was not to deprive the fish of life, but to see what would happen to them. This is how she apprehended death for the first time: the fish became dead although they used to be alive. This metamorphose couldn't be reversed, just the way Polina couldn't go back in time and use the fish food instead. The necessity of the act emerges here retroactively, just the way Alenka Zupančič states it in *Ethics of the Real* when discussing the "quilting point" – Lacanian term for the moment when the signifier gets attached to the signified¹¹:

The vector of (subjective) intention retroactively "quilts" or fixes the vector of the signifying chain: it enters the signifying chain at an "ulterior" point and leaves it at an "anterior" point. The effect of the operations of such a "quilting point" ... is that the subject recognizes, in a contingent series of signifiers, the Meaning (of his existence). This moment of the recognition of Meaning is the moment of subjectivation. (Zupančič, 2000, p. 209).

In other words, a subject becomes a subject once she comprehends the purpose and necessity behind her prior actions or the events that have transpired. The demise of the Russian poet Pushkin serves as a compelling illustration of how significance can be

¹⁰ Translation from Russian: "...на столе стояло два стакана. Один с едой для рыб, другой с ядом для мышей. Я знала, в каком яд. Но было интересно, что будет, если покормить им рыб. Дала немножко. Они в аквариуме сдохли. Я боялась на них смотреть. Они стали мертвые, а были живые."

¹¹ This topic arises when Lacan discusses psychotic subjects who lack those "quilting points" and feel divided from the language because the signifier and the signified are disconnected from one another. A subject needs a certain number of "quilting points" to be free from psychosis.

attributed retroactively to occurrences. As Pushkin journeyed towards the duel that ultimately claimed his life, he encountered a hare crossing the road just ahead of his carriage (which was traditionally considered an ill omen). Pushkin famously believed such signs, turning back whenever confronted by a hare on a path. However, on that occasion, he disregarded his foreboding and proceeded towards the duel. The subsequent fatal outcome has made that encounter with the hare notorious, as it seemingly foretold Pushkin's fateful demise.

Feeding fish with poison was necessary for Polina to know how killing feels: "I was not ashamed. I was scared. A murderer feels fear. Polia."¹² (Jerebtsova, 2014). Here is how Polina becomes a free Kantian (ethical) subject for whom freedom turns around guilt, as Zupančič (2000) puts it. Polina chooses to use the poison although she can use her freedom not to do so – no matter how much we can argue that a nine-year old child doesn't understand what it means to kill or to die. It is the "freedom that manifests itself in the split of the subject" (Zupančič, 2000, p. 27). Polina couldn't have acted any other way as she retroactively needs this very act to become the person that she finally became. She had the choice between two glasses, she could have taken either of them, but in reality, there was only one glass that made this act mean something. Had she fed the fish, she wouldn't have known what it means to be a murderer, and this knowledge was crucial for a survivor of two wars¹³.

¹² Translation from Russian: "Мне не было стыдно. Было страшно. Убийца чувствует страх. Поля".

¹³ As João Guimarães helped me notice, this episode is entailed to a larger literary tradition to link guilt with formation of a subject in autobiography, Bildungsroman, or infantile literature which probably started with confessions of St. Augustine describing his theft of the pears. He wrote: "I stole what I already possessed in abundance and of much better quality. Nor did I desire to enjoy the thing itself which was the object of my inclination to steal, but the very act of stealing, the sin itself." (Saint Augustine, 2008, p. 40). Polina's motive was similar to the one of St. Augustine: she didn't want to kill fish just to kill fish, it was the curiosity that made her do so – the curiosity of the sort could be described as a sin in Christian tradition. Jean-Jaques Rousseau Confessions echo the story with the case of a stolen ribbon. After the narrator is revealed to have it, he blames a maid for giving it to him and thus spoils her entire future without showing a slightest trace of mercy: "She arrives, they show her the ribbon, I charge her brazenly; she remains astonished, is silent, casts a glance at me that would have disarmed demons and that my barbarous heart resisted" (Rousseau, 1995, p. 71). In soviet infantile literature, the motif of guilt was commonly used for didactic purposes. In the short story *The Mystery Clears* (part of *The Adventures of Dennis* by V. Dragunsky) a boy cannot eat his cereal and throws it into a window. In a moment, a man covered with cereal comes into his apartment to complain to his mother along with a policeman. The boy understands: "You were right, Mommy. The truth will out." (Dragunsky, 1981). In the short story *Cucumbers* by N. Nosov the boy steals some cucumbers from a collective-farm plot and

When the first Chechen war started, Polina's life changed dramatically, along with the lives of other people of the Chechen Republic. Weirdly, the Russian government never conceded it an actual war. It is the typical Russian approach, as we might say from the modern standpoint, witnessing the full-scale invasion of the Russian troops in Ukraine which the government of my country continues to call a "special military operation" with a superstitious persistence. The attacks on the Chechen Republic secretly started in 1994 and became evident in the very beginning of 1995 – on the New Year's Eve, the biggest celebration of the year in all Post-Soviet countries. The attack was caused by the strive for independence expressed by the Chechen Republic. In the president Yeltsin's opinion, it was a threat to the integrity of new Post-Soviet Russia as other republics of the North Caucasus could have followed the example. The Chechen fighters were called terrorists or armed gangs, and the frontline used to be called a flashpoint. However, even Valery Tishkov who doesn't support the Chechen strive for independence notes that "[n]o fatal threat to the territorial integrity of Russia existed, but the myth that it did went hand in glove with the myth of Chechen independence" (Tishkov, 2004, p. 74). He believed that nothing threatened Russia's integrity because the idea of independent nation states emerging from the collapsed Soviet Union was doomed (different ethnicities used to inhabit almost all the USSR regions which made it hard to create nation states). However, Tishkov still admits that the military invasion by Russian troops was a crime. (ibid.).

I find it difficult to agree with Tishkov's statement about the failure of the nation-states in the region, since many (post-)Soviet republics have declared independence after 1991. However, I do concur that, back in the day, Chechnya was far from a monoethnic republic. People of various ethnicities used to reside there: Armenians, Ukrainians, Jews, Dagestanis, Russians, and many more. People used to celebrate Christian Easter

then returns them because his mother says: "If you don't put the cucumbers back you needn't come home." (Nosov, n.d.). Both Dragunsky and Nosov are classics of infantile literature written in Russian. In this tradition, the other helps the subject realize what they have done and feel the guilt (the same does Polina's mother). It helps the subject raise their moral standards and become a better person who knows the pain of a "sin" and the grace of knowing to tell right from wrong.

and Muslim Eid al-Adha. That was the Chechen Republic where Polina Jerebtsova felt at home as a child.

Shortly before the war began, everybody could smell danger in the air, and people who had where to leave, started leaving Grozny. There are conflicting points of view on the ethnicity of people who had to stay. In the podcast *The War That Didn't Happen* about the history of the Chechen wars by Holod (independent Russian media currently functioning in exile) and Memorial (center for human rights protection), we can find evidence of both. Yuly Rybakov, a human rights activist who helped civilians flee from Grozny, says that most people who stayed were not Chechens:

The fact is that all those residents remained in the city – and these were primarily Russians, Armenians, Jews – who had nowhere to go. They were those who had no relatives elsewhere in Chechnya. They simply had nowhere to go. They remained in the city. They became victims of bombings and point-blank artillery attacks.¹⁴ (Ponomarev, 2023).

Milana Mazaeva, a journalist of Chechen ethnicity who used to go to school in Grozny when the war began, disagrees with his statement pointing out that there were much more Chechen people who died during the first Chechen war and the assault on Grozny (Ponomarev, 2023):

No, if you look at the statistics, how many ethnic Chechens died during the first war and during the assault – this, of course, is an incomparably greater number compared to the Russians. The reason is that by this time the Russian-speaking population, who had somewhere to leave, left. The second reason is that not all Chechens left; many stayed at home. We left during the first war – only four people of my family left. There were ten people in the family, nine by that time... This is how it used to happen, because people did not want to leave their houses... someone had cows. For example, my uncle disappeared, the

¹⁴ Translation from Russian: “Дело в том, что в городе остались все те жители – а это в первую очередь русские, армяне, евреи – которым некуда было деваться. Это были те, у которого не было родственников в других местах в Чечне. Им просто некуда было деваться. Они и остались в городе. Они и стали жертвами бомбардировок, артиллерийских обстрелов в упор.”

feds took him away... He stayed at home because he had cows that he needed to feed¹⁵. (Ponomarev, 2023).

We don't know the truth because the precise statistics concerning the number of civil victims and their ethnicities doesn't exist. The only number known to date is the statistics of then-Human Rights Commissioner in Russia Sergey Kovalev. During TV debates, Dmitry Rogozin, who is currently a so-called senator of annexed Ukrainian Zaporizhzhia region, blamed Kovalev for being negligent of the rights of Russians. In his answer, Kovalev mentioned nearly 30 000 of deaths in Grozny: "Why did about thirty thousand civilians die in Grozny alone during this time? And by the way, at least 50% of them are Russians."¹⁶ (BIDgital ViD, 2017).

Polina and her mother had nowhere to go, too, and therefore they stayed in Grozny. The war began.

In a warring country, producing speech was the only possible way for Polina to exist. Even before the war, she starts to undersign each entry in her diary to postulate her existence. It is uncommon to undersign diary entries. By doing so, young Polina Jerebtsova creates two effects at a time. The first one is Polina claiming right for existence and reclaiming some pieces of the world which start belonging to her when she undersigns them. With her signatures, Polina postulates her being and gains power. She has a story; she has a name; she decides what to write and how to put it. She is a subject affecting the Real and making a trace in the Symbolic. Not only did she live this story, but also wrote it down, inscribed it into the Symbolic Order, and her name is living evidence of it. In the warring country where her life is put at risk all the

¹⁵ Translation from Russian: "Да нет, если вы посмотрите статистику, сколько этнических чеченцев погибло во время первой войны и во время штурма – это, конечно, несравнимо большее число по сравнению с русскими. Причина в том, что русскоязычному населению к этому времени, у кого было куда уехать, оно уехало. Вторая причина, что не все чеченцы уехали, многие остались дома. Мы уехали во время первой войны – только четверо уехали из моей семьи. Семья десять человек была, девять к тому времени... Так это и происходило, потому что люди не хотели оставлять свои дома... у кого-то коровы. У меня дядя, например, пропал, его забрали федералы... Он остался дома, потому что у него были коровы, которых ему нужно было кормить."

¹⁶ Translation from Russian: "За что погибли порядка тридцати тысяч мирных жителей в одном Грозном за это время? А между прочим, не менее 50% из них – это русские."

time, Polina finds her way to control things through Symbolic. Her story is documented on paper, her name stands on it, she owns it, and she decides how the story looks. In this process, she can be a subject, whereas outside the diary, she is totally dependent on luck and the will of other people who decide if they want to bully, to kill or to expel her out of her own apartment. Her power lives in her writing; in producing speech; in reaching out to the Far Away Symbolic Kingdom.

The second effect of undersigning diary entries is that they start resembling personal letters or notes to somebody who is going to read them in the future. Polina tells her story keeping in mind that she is doing it for some audience, for an unknown reader who will one day know everything about her life – or, at least, everything she captured. She is building her subject keeping in mind the other, reflecting on the other in her thoughts, making herself apprehensible for the imaginary other. She seeks to tell the stories that might be of interest (or worth collective attention) like scenes of war, or anecdotes that might show her as an individual. We are almost sure that her *jouissance* is there, in those stories highlighting her nonbelonging to the world she lives in.

When a friend of hers asks Polina jokingly if she knows what the expression “to pop a cherry” means, Polina writes: “I started to recall the volumes of L. Tolstoy that I read shortly and works of W. Shakespeare. I bet there was no such word in there!”¹⁷ (Jerebtsova, 2014). Or, after a boy teases her that Russian girls he encountered in a Russian village can dance on a table, kiss, and wear mini-skirts, Polina’s mother accuses her of being boring and unable to find any topics for a conversation. Polina writes: “How can I find a topic for discussion? Eric doesn’t talk neither about wise books nor about Greek gods. I in turn don’t know anything about table dance.”¹⁸ (Jerebtsova, 2014). She accentuates her nonbelonging and makes it clear for the imaginary other that she is not like regular girls of her age who are interested in sex and boys. She is a

¹⁷ Translation from Russian: “Я начала было вспоминать труды Л. Толстого, прочитанные недавно, и произведения У. Шекспира. Но в них такого слова не было!”

¹⁸ Translation from Russian: “Как подыскать тему для беседы? О мудрых книгах и греческих богах Эрик ничего не говорит. О танцах на столе я ничего не знаю.”

young pious woman who wears a big head scarf and reads classic literature instead. Polina pursues her *jouissance* by being the one who acts morally. It resembles the situation described by Todd McGowan:

I may even find enjoyment through excessive capitulation – always coming to class on time and always raising my hand whenever the teacher asks a question... One enjoys when one does too much even if this is *too much* of obedience. (McGowan, 2022, p. 56).

Curiously, Polina's *jouissance* coincides with the only way to survive available for her which is incorporating Muslim morality and exercising it extensively and sincerely. By so doing, the heroine achieves the state of universal nonbelonging. On the one hand, she distances herself from the people who expect her to rebel or loosen up – basically, everyone surrounding her in Chechnya. Friends of hers expect Polina to have some typical teenage interests which she doesn't have, and the boy she likes wants her to resemble other Russian girls whom he finds "easier". Polina is too moral for the Chechen youth around her. Simultaneously, she separates herself from Russians, their morality and culture – both because they are attacking her republic and because she has never lived among them. She neither shares their common knowledge about their community and culture nor wants to. So, Polina doesn't belong to either side possible and ends up in double nonbelonging which might be considered as a state of neither belonging nor nonbelonging to either side. She spent all her life in Chechen Republic but doesn't fully belong because she is "Russian" – and, vice versa, she is a "Russian" who has never been to her big and dangerous "motherland" (I use quotation marks here because Polina is not Russian and Russia clearly is not her motherland). In her diary, Polina tells all those stories for the imaginary other to see and reflect her – and also to situate herself in the Symbolic.

Soon enough, when the war begins and goes on, the names Polina chooses to undersign her diary entries start to vary. She starts as Polia, the diminutive version of Polina. Then she becomes Poldi – some playful variation of Polina; afterwards Paulina – a home name deriving from *peacock* in Arabic, as her mother's husband says. With the time, she muslimizes her name more and more: she goes with Patoshka (a Chechen

name), Fatima (an Arabic name), and Budur or Princess Budur – a character of *One Thousand and One Nights*. It reflects both her incorporating Islam deeper and her desire to inscribe herself into the Symbolic Order. Applying Islamic names to herself in the diary is something completely different from going by Islamic name in public. The catch of introducing herself as Fatima is just a trick to avoid discrimination. Calling herself by Islamic names in private, in the diary where nobody can see it, is a fully symbolic act of accepting the Islamic law and adhering to it sincerely.

In contrast to regular Chechen and Arabic names which rather inscribe Polina to the Symbolic Order, going with Budur and Princess Budur gives Polina access to the Imaginary. The young man she is in love with calls her Budur or Princess Budur, and Polina in turn calls him Aladdin. This name game transforms them into fairy tale characters and invites Polina to fantasize about a beautiful life inside the *One Thousand and One Nights* realm. The short period of time when Polina could see Aladdin (we never know his real name) becomes the only moment in her early life when she is reflected by the other. It was the only time when she could imagine herself as whole. Aladdin taught her Arabic and Quran and treated her with respect, just the way it is meant in Islamic law. He used to bring food, tea and medication to her house which was the best way to care for somebody at times of war. Either before or after that loving friendship was Polina reflected by the other with mirror fidelity.

Here we arrive at Polina's problem as a subject: except this one episode, she is not reflected by the other. It is a serious obstacle for Polina to constitute herself as a subject: according to Lacan, it is impossible to complete the process without going through the mirror stage:

(T)he sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his body, one which is premature in relation to a real mastery. This formation is separated from the specific process of maturation and is not confused with it. The subject anticipates on the achievement of psychological mastery, and this anticipation will leave its mark on every subsequent exercise of effective motor mastery. (Lacan, 1991, p. 79).

Here, we extrapolate it on the whole image of the subject including not only her appearance but also her personality¹⁹.

A “Russian” living in Chechen society has a lot in common with a vampire trying to make it in the people’s world: you are dangerous, everybody wants to kill you, and also, you’ve got no reflection. If we continue with this tongue-in-cheek metaphor, such person might be considered a living dead. As provided by Zupančič (2023), we are all undead in the Real – the exact place Polina inhabits. She exists as a surplus life with no place in the Symbolic. To have one (along with reflection), Polina chooses to incorporate the standards of a pious Muslim woman meaning not to perform but to truly become one. It is rooted in her *jouissance* – the desire to act morally, and Muslim ethics gives her coordinates to navigate in the ethic dimension.

The subject’s double nonbelonging (neither belonging nor complete nonbelonging) is comprehensible for the other yet impossible to imagine. One can see at a glance that Polina’s ethnicity is not Chechen; her name and surname clearly confirm it. However, her skirts are longer than those of many Chechen women; her head scarf is bigger; she recites Quran in Arabic by heart, lowers her eyes when talking to elder people and holds fasting. She is something that cannot be – a “Russian” woman who is more righteous than many ethnic Chechens of Islamic faith. She is so ungraspably uncommon that there is no place for her in the Imaginary Order of the Muslim other because the Imaginary is structured by the Symbolic, and nothing like Polina exists in the Symbolic whatsoever.

Having no place for the subject neither in the Symbolic, nor in the Imaginary, the other reflects the subject the only way available – as a Russian enemy:

Everything is bad at school. The new teacher doesn’t speak Russian. She hated me immediately after having seen my surname. “Russians are bastards.

¹⁹ Lorenzo Chiesa also links the Lacanian notion of the mirror stage and its tie to formation of the whole-body image with the formation of the subject (and the ego). According to Chiesa, “Lacan recognizes that the subject’s imaginary identity lies outside of himself. It corresponds to a paradoxically alienated identity”. (Chiesa, 2007, p. 15). So, the subject needs the other to constitute her identity, the locus of the subject’s emergence is the other. When the other draws himself out of this process, the formation of the subject is impeded or even impossible.

Russians kill Chechens!” . But I haven’t killed anybody! It is my grandfather who was killed under heavy fire in a hospital!²⁰ (Jerebtsova, 2014).

This quote also shows us that Polina doesn’t have anyone to put in the position of a subject supposed to know²¹. No one is in position of knowledge regarding her. It is quite the opposite: everybody is in the position of knowing it wrong. Nobody seems to apprehend Polina in her liminal nonbelonging and she cannot formulate it clearly to herself. Even people conventionally expected to be subjects supposed to know (her mother or her schoolteachers) appear not to know the truth about Polina.

Being not reflected by the other, failing to take any place neither in the Imaginary nor in the Symbolic, the subject slips into the Real and continues to exist as impossible, seen and unseen, neither belonging nor nonbelonging which is, if we think of it, the ultimate human condition. In any group, any subject can find a foundation for her belonging as well as for nonbelonging. The latter although can never be full or completed since nonbelonging includes the cause of belonging. The decision regarding belonging or nonbelonging is made on a base of comparison (a subject must comply with some condition, have *something* in order to belong, and the comparison is made on the base of this *something*). There is a Russian saying “don’t you mix up the warm with the soft” – it means that we need a common foundation to compare things (or subjects, in this case). We can either compare them in terms of their warmth or their

²⁰ Translation from Russian: “В школе всё плохо. Новая учительница не говорит по-русски. Увидев мою фамилию, сразу возненавидела. Сказала: 'Русские – твари! Русские убивают чеченцев!' Но я никого не убивала! Это моего дедушку убило под обстрелом в больнице!”.

²¹ Žižek described the phenomenon of a subject supposed to know as the other who can know for me: “Such a displacement of our most intimate feelings and attitudes onto some figure of the Other is at the very core of Lacan’s notion of the big Other; it can affect not only feelings but also beliefs and knowledge – the Other can also believe and know for me. In order to designate this displacement of the subject’s knowledge onto another, Lacan coined the notion of the subject supposed to know.” (Žižek, 2006, p. 27). This phenomenon functions in the therapy when an analysand expects the analyst to know her secrets: “...this is how the psychoanalyst as the ‘subject supposed to know’ functions in the treatment: once the patient is engaged in the treatment, he has the same absolute certainty that the analyst knows his secret... The analyst... embodies the absolute certainty... of the patient’s unconscious desire. For Lacan, this strange transposition of what I already know in my unconscious onto the figure of the analyst is at the core of the phenomenon of transference in the treatment: I can only arrive at the unconscious meaning of my symptoms if I presuppose that the analyst already knows their meaning.” (ibid., p. 27). In other words, it is necessary for the subject to constitute her subjectiveness by projecting her knowledge (or idea) of herself onto the other. For Polina, nobody takes over the function of the blank screen, or the subject supposed to know, which complicates the task.

softness, otherwise the comparison is impossible and doesn't make any sense. If there is no base for comparison, the subject doesn't belong entirely, and the nonbelonging is complete. The trick is that all people are people, and all subjects are subjects – consequently, they always have a basis for comparison. Thus, all nonbelonging is incomplete, isn't full – in actuality, it is a not nonbelonging – or, as I will refer to it further, it is liminal nonbelonging.

Polina accepts this condition of hers. She could have lived with it if the other hadn't started their attempt to substitute Polina's liminal nonbelonging with complete nonbelonging – this is, depriving her of her subjectivity. Since then, she starts to conceal her liminal nonbelonging and to publicly substitute it with a newly constructed subjectivity of a Muslim woman. It was the only sort of subjectivity acceptable for her because Polina needed to make room for herself in the Symbolic Order of the other.

Paradoxically, being subject to suppression of law is the only way for her to be a subject and continue to exist. Slipping out of the law (the Symbolic) threatens Polina's life²². If she is not subject to any law, anyone can do anything to her and get away with it. Being inscribed into the Symbolic means having some rights, security guarantees and a possibility to function inside the society. I will illustrate it with an analogy which is well-known for every exiled individual. A person with an ID, a bank account, a legal address, and able to speak the local language has much more chances to survive than one without valid documents, money, and place to live (and receive correspondence which sometimes appears to be more important because it contains even more symbolic connotations). The same goes for the Chechen society back in the day, but the criteria of being inscribed into its Symbolic Order are both vaguer and more obvious at the same time. One can be admitted as subject to the law if she looks and

²² Being forced out of the Symbolic is a threat to human existence not only at the level of the Symbolic, but also at the level of the Real. Not being included into Symbolic can be regarded as a way to be deprived of a part of humanness. As Žižek puts it: "The symbolic order, society's unwritten construction, is the second nature of every speaking being: it is here, directing and controlling my acts; it is the sea I swim in, yet it remains ultimately impenetrable – I can never put it in front of me and grasp it". (Žižek, 2006, p. 8). This is the reason for Polina to fight for her place in the Symbolic: if she loses it, she is not only defenseless, but also doomed as a fish left on the shore. Although the Symbolic doesn't stop controlling Polina's actions, she needs the other to admit this fact.

behaves in accordance with Islamic law, if she has an appropriate name and surname, and if there are people who can testify that she belongs and/or protect her. Somehow, one must not only be accepted to the law but also accept the law inside herself. Otherwise, the discrepancy between the internal and the external will prevent the law from protecting the subject:

I like kerchiefs and head scarves. I don't like the emancipated women of the West. Any clothes with a matching scarf are romance, tenderness, mystery.

I was advised to wear a head scarf by my mother's friend. He explained it to me: "Then I will be able to protect you. You are growing up. You need protection!".²³ (Jerebtsova, 2014)

The presence of law plays the same role for all women – not only in Islamic society. Falling under the Symbolic Law is simultaneously a limitation for a woman as a subject and her guarantee for survival. In the law which structures society, woman always takes an inferior position in relation to man. She is subject to various prohibitions and standards; she is expected to obey, not take too much space, and sacrifice herself for the sake of the others. Nevertheless, within the law she can claim for at least some space (yet not too much); she has a legitimate way of pursuing her enjoyment in sacrificing and serving. Hence, the Symbolic is both repressing the woman and giving her a chance to survive and to even own her (repressed) life.

Head scarf is a highly powerful tool which inscribes Polina both into the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Firstly, as a young woman who covers her head, she gains a recognizable and respectable look. This image of belonging adds her security, and here she enters the Symbolic, or the law. Anyone in the street can immediately understand that a dignified woman stands in front of him and therefore won't hurt her: this look testifies that she is under God's and man's protection. If it doesn't work and someone hurts a veiled woman, the mother's friend has all rights on revenge. Francine Banner discusses

²³ Translation from Russian: "Я люблю косынки и платки. Мне не нравятся эмансипированные женщины Запада. Любая одежда с шарфом в тон – романтика, нежность и тайна. Носить платок мне советовал друг мамы. Объяснял: 'Тогда я смогу за тебя заступиться. Ты вырастешь. Тебе защита нужна!'"

the topic in her study of beauty pageants in post-war Chechen Republic. She writes that male protection is crucial to survive in Chechnya (I dare to add that having an image of a woman protected by a man is also helpful, even if there is no man in your family: maybe no one wants to find it out). Francine Banner quotes a human rights worker from Chechnya:

Sonia observes, 'If you really have no male relatives at all, like, not even an uncle, you are completely vulnerable to all sorts of exploitation and harassment and anything, because nobody will – you know – *you look like you have no protection*'. (Banner, 2009).

Francine Banner italicizes the “you look like you have no protection” part and it strikes us how the Imaginary and the Symbolic interweave. If you look like you have protection (have a hijab on, in Polina’s case), it almost means that you do have it (the Symbolic still structures the Imaginary).

At the same time, Polina, just like a Muslim woman, doesn’t wear scarf only for the other to accept her or to protect her. Wearing a hijab is her intrinsic urge. Head scarf is not something that confines her or takes away her autonomy. On the contrary, it is a part of her subjectivity; she chooses to wear a head scarf because she is a subject – and it helps her constitute herself as a subject. As Joan Copjec (2006) attests, Islamic culture is linked to shame in our mind, and experiencing shame doesn’t mean experiencing oneself as an object observed, but as a subject in her inner split. Using a hijab helps the subject maintain the untransgressible distance to herself and gives her privacy and protection not only from the outer world, but also from herself. Copjec states: “*This* is the radical point: the gaze under which I feel myself observed in shame is my *own* gaze” (ibid., p. 26). In Polina’s subjectivity and desire to cover her head, we find the same motives. She feels ashamed of herself because deep inside she knows that she doesn’t belong. Being seen as an outlier is not the worst thing for her: she came to feel an outsider even before the war, when nobody imposed nonbelonging on her. It is her own idea of herself as an outsider that makes her feel ashamed. She knows that she can never fully attach to those around her, she is not-whole in a sense that she neither belongs nor not belongs completely. She is irreversibly split between

the only world she has ever known and some unknown outside world which she has never experienced. At this point, she already becomes a subject: as Alenka Zupančič describes this situation, “(t)he subject gains access to freedom only in so far as she finds herself a stranger in her own house” (Zupančič, 2000, p. 22). This exact thing happens to Polina: she is a stranger in her own house but struggles to accept it. Her intent is to be an insider and, first of all, convince herself of being one as if she were trying to reject her natural subjectivity and constitute a new, more appropriate one.

So, Polina decides to wear a head scarf. On the one hand, she refers to it as to a means of maintaining a mystery about herself; of hiding (first and foremost from herself) that she is not who she says she is. On the other hand, it is also a way for her to pursue her *jouissance* which is to act morally. Even when a photographer takes a picture of her schoolmates, no other girl is wearing a tiny little scarf, and Polina has a big one on. The photographer refuses to take a picture of anybody in a scarf because “It is Europe here.”²⁴ (Jerebtsova, 2014). Consequently, Polina has no chance to appear on the photo, but chooses to stubbornly wear her scarf. This garment becomes of a great significance to her. When a classmate attempts to humiliate her, he tears the scarf off her head. When she loses it under a shelling and finds it in the next morning, she is more than happy. When, in the end of the book, she arrives in Russia, a local woman says: “Get off the scarf! You are Russian, don’t embarrass yourself.”²⁵ (Jerebtsova, 2014). Everybody including Polina herself knows that the scarf has something to do with the foundation of her personality; with something that makes her herself and shapes her point of view. It is linked with her being a subject. This is why depriving her of the scarf means to tame her, to make her harmless and obedient. These attempts to deprive Polina of her scarf have therefore a political dimension, and she feels it and fights for her right to be a subject and to keep her scarf. She continues as ungraspable, liminal nonbelonging, impossible subject.

Hence, Polina is in a sort of non-relation with the other. As Alenka Zupančič puts it: “The non-relation is not the opposite of the relationship, it is *the inherent (il)logic... of*

²⁴ Translation from Russian: “У нас тут Европа!”

²⁵ Translation from Russian: “Сними платок! Ты ведь русская. Не позорься.”

the relationships that are possible and existing” (Zupančič, 2007, p. 24). For Polina, it is her superposition of liminal nonbelonging; her striving to squeeze herself into the Symbolic Order and constantly slipping out of it. It is the constant tension of the potentialities and ambiguities hidden in her contradictory position. What is happening to her is the other’s attempt to abolish this non-relation. It can be most fully described with the logic of Lacan and Zupančič: the abolition of the non-relation is the “trademark of all social repression” (ibid., p. 25). Chechen people strive to create the relation of the “friend or foe” kind. They perceive Polina as a totally nonbelonging racial other that is the obstacle for their *jouissance*: she is a “Russian”, and Russians kill Chechens – consequently, she is to blame for the war and all the loss and grief it brought.

Seeing the other as an obstacle for one’s *jouissance* as described by Todd McGowan (2022) is the core of the racist fantasy. Still, it is not the only reason for the Chechens to perceive Polina as an enemy. As Aurélie Campana testifies, “(i)t is true that war is an essential social and political ingredient in the unity of the Chechen imaginary” (Campana, 2006, p. 133). I dare to specify this statement: it is not some abstract war that unites the Chechen Imaginary, but war with Russians. That war began in the nineteenth century, followed by rebellion against collectivization and anti-religious operations in 1920–1930s and then by deportation of Chechen people to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Nearly hundred thousand Chechens died due to this repressive measure. Forced exile resulted as a trauma in collective Chechen memory and “has deeply altered self-perception and self-identification amongst Chechens” (ibid., p. 132). These memories along with the trauma were still present in the Imaginary when the first Chechen war began. It could have started to heal, had the Post-Soviet Russia chosen politics of peace and not of preserving the empire. Unfortunately, the government decided to start a war instead, and the constitutive trauma of the Chechen Imaginary continued as undead. The war happened as a “return of living dead”, as a “result, a symptom of failed funeral rites, in a broader sense of a failed integration of a traumatic event into the symbolic” (Zupančič, 2023).

Declaration of independence of the Chechen Republic was an attempt to integrate the two-hundred-year feud into the Symbolic; to bury the history of dependency and oppression just the way various Post-Soviet republics did by splitting off the Soviet Union and founding their own states. Independence could be the first part of funeral rites helping the society recognize dead as dead and separate it from the world of the living. The second part should have happened on the Russian side. Russia should have recognized genocide of Chechen people in USSR and take measures to never ever commit anything of the kind again. None of the above happened, and the “living dead” continued to haunt both sides of the conflict – and they are going to do so until “we give them a decent burial, until we integrate the trauma of their death into our historical memory”, as Žižek puts it (Žižek, 1992, p. 16). Fifteen years after Second Chechen war ended, no decent funeral happened whatsoever: Russia still publishes history textbooks with no information about the 1944 deportation of Chechen and Ingush people (Larina, 2023). It is the very same thing that Creon does by refusing to bury Oedipus; it is the same “strange attempt to integrate the traumatic event into the symbolic by excluding it from it; that is, by redoubling the exclusion.” (Zupančič, 2023).

Russo-Chechen wars aggravated the trauma in the Chechen Imaginary leaving no chance to reconstitute the Imaginary. On the opposite, it continued shaping the narrative of collective Chechen identity around the grief caused by the Russian other. “Identities are defined in relation to other groups and subject to continuous negotiations” (Campana, 2006, p. 130), and the negotiations between Chechens and Russians mostly assume the form of war. The Chechen people surrounding Polina in Grozny follow this pattern in constituting their own subjectivity. To many of them, to be a subject means to hate Russians: the narrative of being Chechen has scarcely ever included being friends with those who have always meant to kill or exile Chechens. In the collective Chechen Imaginary, there is no “good Russian” or “Russian who shares your destiny”²⁶ – and Polina happens to be an impossible subject once again. Nobody

²⁶ This impossibility to recognize Polina as the one who shares the destiny of the Chechen people in Grozny is something symptomatic for a situation of war. It is a sort of misrecognition which Steven Miller describes as an intrinsic feature of a war: “Freud turns from the war of the ‘war neuroses’ to a literary or phantasmatic construction of war as a complex scene of misrecognition. Of particular interest

sees her as a possible friend or ally because admitting such thoughts means refusing from Chechen identity. No one wants to undermine their identity at times of war; no Russian is worth it.

Curiously, this constitutive power of feud is not reciprocal, Russians don't let it into the core of their identity. Here we can recall the questions asked by Slavoj Žižek in "Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle" when reflecting on the war of the USA against Iraq:

[W]hat if this 'collateral damage' is the true aim of the entire operation? What if the true target of the 'war on terror' is not only a global geopolitical rearrangement of the Middle East and beyond, but also American society itself (namely, the repression on whatever remains of its emancipatory potential)? (Žižek, 2004, p. 19).

If we reformulate these questions to suit the topic of Russo-Chechen wars, the answers will be "indeed it is". Russia did really use those wars as a pretext to stiffen its law enforcement practices up to the illegal extent. First, Russia is proven to have used torture against Chechen civilians during the wartime (Orlov, Cherkasov, Sirotkin, 1995). Some years after, Russian police started incorporating the torture into their common practice. Today, stifling the suspects with plastic bags, using stun guns and sexualized violence even against political prisoners has become a common thing for the Russian police officers. Chechen Republic was used as a polygon to practice new (and crueler) repressive measures to report them into the metropolis after their effectiveness has been proven. Coincidentally, the situation was described by Žižek, too:

And is it not the brutal intervention of the Russian police into the Moscow theatre, killing more of their own people than of the Chechen 'terrorists', a clear indication of the fact that we are all potentially Homo sacer? It is not that some of us are full cull citizens when others are excluded – and unexpected state of emergency can exclude every one of us. (Žižek, 2004, p. 55).

is the way in which Tasso's tragic drama explores the role of identity, misrecognition, and simulation in combat" (Miller, 2014, p. 11). War is a tragedy of misrecognition taking place among combatants and non-combatants alike.

The event described happened during the second Chechen war, in 2002, and it had its predecessor during the first Chechen war. It was the Budyonnovsk hospital hostage crisis, a tragic event that followed the same logic. On June 14, 1995, round 200 Chechen combatants entered Budyonnovsk, a town in Stavropol region of Russia. They took hostage about 1500 people, and their leader Shamil Basayev demanded to stop the military action in Chechnya and withdraw Russian troops from its territory. Russian armed forces attacked the hospital because of their convicted decision not to negotiate with terrorists. As a result, at least 105 hostages were killed. The crisis resulted in Chechen combatants being released back to Chechen Republic accompanied by 139 voluntary hostages to provide their safety on the way to Chechnya and guarantee that Chechen combatants won't be attacked by Russian troops. In his diary, Oleg Orlov, the chairman of Memorial, center for human rights protection, and then-assistant of Commissioner for Human Rights in Russia Sergey Kovalev, mentions that voluntary hostages had to assign a warrant about "joining the Basayev's group" (Orlov, 2023). The warrant stated:

"I (empty space left for a name) voluntarily join the bandit group of Sh. Basayev and go to Chechen Republic with them, realizing all the possible consequences of my decision". (Redaktsiya, 2020)²⁷.

By providing this warrant to the people who voluntarily risked their lives to save the hospital hostages, the Russian government introduced the *Homo sacer* regime to any- and everybody who intervene into the governmental activities (i. e. those who dare to be political subjects). From that moment on, acting politically withdrew all the guarantees for a Russian citizen. In controversy with Chechens realizing their identity (and subjectivity, we might add) through the feud with Russians, the Russian Imaginary gets familiar with their desubjectivation and non-identity through the feud with Chechens. When relation with a Chechen person is at stake, becoming a subject is impossible for a Russian. Here, Polina continues as an impossible subject once again.

²⁷ Translation from Russian: "Я (пропуск для имени) добровольно присоединяюсь к бандитской группе Ш. Басаева и выезжаю с ней в Чеченскую республику, осознавая все возможные последствия своего решения."

To protect herself from the destructive “friend or foe” relation imposed on her by the other, Polina seeks to build a symmetric relationship – one of affiliation to the society where she was born and raised. She integrates herself into the patriarchal relation inherent to the structure of the Muslim society relying on other binary oppositions, such as “man – woman”, “young – old”, “pious – depraved”. Both kinds of relation (“friend or foe” and patriarchal dichotomies) abolish the non-relation and presuppose social repression; both exist within the Symbolic – but only one of them gives her a chance to survive. Weirdly, she precisely needs the relation to survive since it allows her for Symbolic Order (the law) and prevents her from falling into the Real.

Still, Polina continues to exist as an impossible subject under the impossible circumstances. Relying on the Žižek’s definition, we can call her existence a truly political act: “That is the effect of a true political act: it changes the coordinates of the situation, and renders the unthinkable thinkable” (Žižek, 2004, p. 39). It is a political act of hers to continue surviving in Chechen Republic even if she has no other choice. It is a political act of hers to constitute herself as a subject despite the pressure of the other depriving her of this right (highlighting her nonbelonging, threatening her life, and refusing to reflect Polina in her wholeness). It is a political act of hers to cover her head and to stand by her decision no matter what. Finally, it is a political act of hers to continue writing her diary throughout ten long years of war. She insists on producing speech even under bombings, in the darkness, using obscure formulations to hide details which could harm her or other people. Every detail of Polina’s life gains political dimension, even her choice of words.

In her diary, Polina seems to let the language speak through her. She tends to use truisms, dead metaphors, clichés – anything and everything that can be called a stable expression. This style produces various effects on the reader. For instance, it makes us think of impersonal language of soviet local press. It is dry and semi-automatic. One can compose a message using such clichés even being unconscious: “we were wondering in search for food”, “they spread a new lie about me”, “these are new orphans of my motherland”, “we are grateful to everybody who gave us a helping

hand”²⁸ etc. The choice of superficial constructions usually testifies a poor writing skill and lack of diligence. In case of Polina Jerebtsova, I would argue with this point of view. To her, the choice of common words and constructions functions as a bulletproof vest. It prevents the horrors of the Real from infiltrating her mind – it is slipping on the surface instead, and therefore the damage is reduced. She doesn’t look for a better word to describe a horrible situation because there is no need to do so. The situation is already horrible enough to impress any reader. Painting it vividly would destroy both the writer and the reader. In a sense, she invites the language itself to take the mic and structure the immense excess of the Real that she met during the war²⁹.

Polina sees her mission in witnessing what is going on and documenting it: “I came on planet Earth to become a witness. Apparently, a witness is my karma. I am a witness, but not a partaker. Worse for me. It means I must write everything down. Document the history.”³⁰ (Jerebtsova, 2014). Producing speech is not only her strategy for survival, but the purpose of her life. There is no sense in surviving if she is not generating any speech. Life and speech are inseparable to Polina. To her, life entails speech and speech entails life.

She continues: “You know, Diary, sometimes I happen to be happy. When I speak to myself. Just to take a rest from the life that surrounds me.”³¹ (Jerebtsova, 2014).

Producing speech also means happiness to her; it makes her life not only possible, but also bearable.

²⁸ Translation from Russian: “ходили в поисках пищи”, “распространили новую ложь обо мне”, “это новые сироты моей родины”, “благодарны всем, кто протянул руку помощи”.

²⁹ Curiously, letting the language speak through her is also a gesture that ties Polina to the Symbolic. Citing Žižek: “For Lacan, language is a gift as dangerous to humanity as the horse was to the Trojans: it offers itself to our use free of charge, but once we accept it, it colonizes us. The symbolic order emerges from a gift, an offering, that marks its content as neutral in order to pose as a gift: when a gift is offered what matters is not its content but the link between giver and receiver established when receiver accepts the gift”. (Žižek, 2006, p. 12). By showing that she has the gift, Polina claims her place in the Symbolic and accentuates her (desired) belonging.

³⁰ Translation from Russian: “На планету Земля я пришла, чтобы стать свидетелем. Видимо, свидетель – моя карма. Я – свидетель, но я – не участник. Мне еще хуже. Значит, я должна всё записывать. Фиксировать историю.”

³¹ Translation from Russian: “Знаешь, Дневник, иногда я бываю счастлива. Когда разговариваю сама с собой. Лишь бы отдохнуть от окружающей меня жизни!”

Constituting herself as a subject, Polina makes a tremendous move toward actually seeing the war. Žižek argues about any available depictions of the war being abstract (both from computer-guided projectiles and from reporters staying with the troops). He attests that the “depiction of experience of combatants is abstract in a sense that it obfuscates the concrete totality which provides the true global meaning of war” (Žižek, 2004, p. 4). It is hard to argue with that, but this statement provokes an obvious question: who at all can grasp the concrete totality of war? If not a reporter, can a camera of a projectile do it? That is even less likely since it has a far more limited vision and no subjectivity at all, and subjectivity is key to apprehend being at what it is:

For what if reality is not neutral, but torn by an inherent impossibility and contradiction? Or, more precisely, what if neutrality itself is not “neutral”, but already implies a subjective imposition, a normative “neutralization”? In that case the subjective excessiveness brings us closer to the truth, as well as to the possibility of engaging with reality’s contradictions. (Zupančič, 2007, p. 131)

Polina’s subjectivity, if not permitting her capture the totality of war, gives her access to it. By constituting herself as a subject, she gains the ability to really see and document war with all the evil done by both sides and all the help she receives from people of different ethnicities. Her depiction of war is, no doubt, different from one that an “embedded reporter” could provide. The “objective” position is not imposed on her by her government’s politics, the orientation of a TV channel or so-called “journalistic neutrality”. She looks at the world with her eye and transfers the reality she saw into words with no other lens than her subjectivity.

Throughout this chapter, we saw Polina Jerebtsova constitute herself as an impossible subject. It is her being situated outside both the Symbolic and the Imaginary and her consequent slipping into the Real which makes her subjectivity impossible. However, the Symbolic which traditionally is a source of oppression is also the only guarantee for her to stay alive. I dare to say that all the female subjects find themselves in the same

situation. They inhabit the Real and struggle to find some place in the Symbolic which ejects and oppresses them.

Polina exists as an impossible subject regardless of all the obstacles she meets. Despite her having no other options, her existence as impossible subject is a political act due to the very fact that she makes her unthinkable existence real. This statement can also be extrapolated: being a feminine subject is always a political act because it requires making the impossible possible.

In her daily life in Chechen Republic, Polina assumes the position of neither belonging nor nonbelonging. There is no complete belonging possible because every subject has a cause for nonbelonging. Polina doesn't belong in Chechnya due to her ethnicity. The condition of complete nonbelonging is also impossible because every subject has a cause to belong to a group: the question if the subject belongs already opens the possibility for belonging. I called this state liminal nonbelonging and assume it the ultimate human condition that Polina shares as a subject, too.

After two months of having it in a glass jar, Polina let out the ant that became the metaphor for herself. She wrote: "I let the ant out. It failed to build a castle in the glass jar. Apparently, he decided not to. Didn't want to do it for me. Or couldn't do it alone. Polia."³² (Jerebtsova, 2014).

Unlike the ant, Polina Jerebtsova did it. She made it through two wars and got asylum in Finland where she is safe from both Russian government and Chechen avengers. She managed to build a castle in a glass jar all alone.

³² Translation from Russian: «Отпустила муравья. Он так и не построил дворец в стеклянной банке. Наверное, просто не стал. Не захотел для меня. Или не смог один. Поля».

2. *Child of the Dark* by Carolina Maria de Jesus: Alienation of a Racialized Subject

Some books have their canonical ways of representation – commonly known facts to bring up when the book or the author are mentioned. Those facts shape our expectations, so that we know what is at stake before we read. Say, unedited books. I know two examples of books with minor corrections. The first one is *Word for Word* by Lilianna Lungina, a Soviet translator of Astrid Lindgren, Knut Gamsun and Heinrich Böll. *Word for Word* is a memoir known for representing Lungina's speech verbatim. It was composed by Oleg Dorman, the director of the eponymous documentary about Lungina. He started the preface to the book by emphasizing that the book had undergone almost no redaction:

This book is a transcript of an oral account by Lilianna Zinovievna Lungina of her own life, which was presented in a documentary series *Word for Word*.

I've added the most minor corrections, which are standard in a publication of any transcript, and have added those parts of the stories that could not, for various reasons, make it into the film... (Dorman, 2014).

The language of *Word by Word* is easy to read and well-organized – it is hard to write like this, let alone to speak. As a rule, oral speech is less structured and needs certain redaction if we want to put it on paper, but Lungina speaks with perfectly structured phrases. This impressive way of speaking is part of Lungina's image as a talented translator and as a member of a distinguished family (her husband Semyon Lungin was a playwright and both sons became film directors). Her book is seen as a masterpiece of sorts.

The second "unedited book" I read is *Child of the Dark* (*Quarto de Despejo*) by Carolina Maria de Jesus. She is always presented using the same three facts: De Jesus was a black Brazilian woman, she used to live in the favela de Canindé in São Paulo, she had only two years of education. *Child of the Dark* is the diary that De Jesus kept from 1955 to 1959, depicting the misery of the favela, the hunger and racism that she experienced day by day. The editor claimed to have kept her speech almost intact:

Repetition of the favela routine, no matter how faithful it was, would be exhausting. That's why cuts were made, the most significant excerpts were selected... I changed... the punctuation, just as in some words the spelling could lead to incomprehension of the reading. And that was it, until the last line.³³ (Dantas, 2016).

Having to work with the direct speech, editors adopt opposite strategies: to lengthen the story of a white widely-known woman of letters who belongs to literary canon and to cut the story of the unknown black author because, in the words of Audálio Dantas, the editor of *De Jesus*, she talks too much about not having much to eat:

Hunger appears in the text with irritating frequency. Tragic, irredeemable character. So big and so striking that it acquires color in Carolina's tragically poetic narrative... Carolina saw the color of hunger — the Yellow. In the treatment I gave to the original, many times, due to too much presence, the Yellow left the scene...³⁴ (Dantas, 2016).

It would be dull for a (white) reader to see the author being hungry repeatedly, so the editor cut out the repetitions.

Child of the Dark was translated into thirteen languages and in Brazil the number of copies sold was near one hundred thousand, which makes both the author and the book worth celebrating. Still, the preface to the 2016 edition calls the author a “pathetic Cinderella who left the rubbish pile to shine brightly in the city lights”³⁵ (ibid.). She became “an article of consumption and, in a certain sense, a strange animal

³³ Translation from Portuguese: “A repetição da rotina favelada, por mais fiel que fosse, seria exaustiva. Por isso foram feitos cortes, selecionados os trechos mais significativos... Mexi... na pontuação, assim como em algumas palavras cuja grafia poderia levar à incompreensão da leitura. E foi só, até a última linha”.

³⁴ Translation from Portuguese: “A fome aparece com uma frequência irritante. Personagem trágica, inarredável. Tão grande e tão marcante que adquire cor na narrativa tragicamente poética de Carolina... Carolina viu a cor da fome — a Amarela... No tratamento que dei ao original, muitas vezes, por excessiva presença, a Amarela saiu da cena...”

³⁵ Translation from Portuguese: “patética Cinderela saída do borralho de lixo para brilhar intensamente sob as luzes da cidade”.

that exhibited itself 'like an exciting curiosity', as recorded by the writer Luís Martins"³⁶ (ibid.).

The black author is refused the status of a "woman of speech". Instead, she is either dehumanized ("a strange animal") or reminded about her origin, "her place" (the favela), which implies that she should stay there. As Grada Kilomba puts it: "Blackness signifies not only 'inferiority' but also '*being out of place*' while whiteness signifies '*being in place*' and therefore 'superiority'." (Kilomba, 2010, p. 30). De Jesus is out of place for the literature: black authors from the favelas don't belong in the literary canon – not even as authors of circus plays: "I wrote plays and showed them to directors of circuses. They told me: 'It's a shame you are black'." (De Jesus, 2003, p. 57). The world imposes on her the impossibility to belong anywhere except "her place".

When discussing black female subjectivity, it is hard to divorce our thought both from object vs. subject dichotomy and the notion of *place*, which inevitably entails Žižek's idea of an *ugly object*:

The ugly object is an object in the wrong place... Ugliness is thus a topological category, designating an object that is a way "larger than itself," whose existence is larger than its representation. The ontological presupposition of ugliness is thus a gap between an object and the space it occupies. (Žižek, 1998, p. 165).

To the white people struggling to acknowledge her subjectivity, leaving the favela and producing speech turned De Jesus into an ugly object. The Other cannot accept her being larger than her book, and the struggle of the Other is to impede De Jesus becoming a subject; to reduce her to a set of stereotypes and, thus, put the object in its *place*.

Symptomatically, the notion of *place* is of great significance in the modern Brazilian decolonial discourse – it is the notion of *place of speech* (*lugar de fala*). The concept

³⁶ Translation from Portuguese: "transformou-se em artigo de consumo e, em certo sentido, num bicho estranho que se exibia 'como uma excitante curiosidade', conforme registrou o escritor Luís Martins".

emphasizes the existence of numerous *places of speech* to describe the heritage of slavery and the fact that it is essential to consider this problem from the place of those who suffered due to it and not only from the point of view of the beneficiaries:

In a society like Brazil, with a slave heritage, black people will experience racism from the place of those who are the object of this oppression, from the place that restricts opportunities due to this system of oppression. White people will experience the place of those who benefit from this same oppression.

Therefore, both groups can and should discuss these issues, but they will speak from different places. We are saying, mainly, that we want and demand that the story about slavery in Brazil be told from our perspectives too and not just from the perspective of those who won.³⁷ (Ribeiro, 2017).

Djamila Ribeiro, the philosopher who popularized this concept, emphasizes that in relation of place of speech: “The discussion is above all structural... because the critics of the theory... misunderstood the issue and ended up... reducing the point of view to individual experiences instead of reflecting on social *locus*.”³⁸ (ibid., 2017).

In the words of Kilomba, “we all speak from a specific time and place, from a specific history and reality – there are no neutral discourses.” (Kilomba, 2010, p. 31). It seems to be a universal disposition, but in the case of Brazil it gains essential importance because of the slavery that used to exist in the country. It left a painful legacy of institutionalized racism as the underlying reason of slavery was clearly racial: the enslaved people were either Black or indigenous. Racism and slavery are hard to separate from each other. As Robinson claims, “the Atlantic slave trade and the slavery of the New World were integral to the modern world economy. Their relationship to

³⁷ Translation from Portuguese: “Numa sociedade como a brasileira, de herança escravocrata, pessoas negras vão experienciar racismo do lugar de quem é objeto dessa opressão, do lugar que restringe oportunidades por conta desse sistema de opressão. Pessoas brancas vão experienciar do lugar de quem se beneficia dessa mesma opressão. Logo, ambos os grupos podem e devem discutir essas questões, mas falarão de lugares distintos. Estamos dizendo, principalmente, que queremos e reivindicamos que a história sobre a escravidão no Brasil seja contada por nossas perspectivas também e não somente pela perspectiva de quem venceu.”

³⁸ Translation from Portuguese: “A discussão é sobretudo estrutural... como os acusadores dessa teoria entenderam equivocadamente a questão e acabam agindo... ao reduzir ponto de vista às experiências individuais em vez de refletirem sobre *locus* social.”

capitalism was historic and organic.” (Robinson, 2000). For several centuries, slavery used to be a source of cheap and unpaid labor that helped capitalists gain surplus value by using coercion. Slaves were seen as mere means of production, not people:

While the slave trade lasted, the masters were "indifferent to the duration of the slave trade... the slave, working for a year, in addition to planting and harvesting for sustenance, produced a liquid product that covered at least his value: from the second year onwards, everything was profit. So why worry too much about them when it was so easy to get new ones at a low price?"³⁹
(Senator Cristian Otoni apud Giacomini, 1988, p. 24).

McGowan links capitalism to racism: “Capitalism cannot function without racism, which is why a racist ideology must arise and continue to predominate within the capitalist universe.” (McGowan, 2022). Three those intertwined hierarchic systems: slavery, racism, capitalism – are the symbolic structures within which every person has her own *place*. Provided by Mbebe, the *place* of a Black subject in this matrix is the worst: “the slave is not a subject but instead a commodity like any other.” (Mbebe, 2019, p. 18). The term *pro-slavery democracy* that he used to describe the USA before the abolition is applicable to pre-abolition Brazil as well. He states:

A pro-slavery democracy is characterized by its bifurcation. Two orders coexist within it – a *community of fellow creatures* governed, at least in principle, by the law of equality, and a *category of nonfellows*, or even of those without part, that is also established by law. A priori, those without part have no right to have rights. They are governed by the law of inequality. (ibid., p. 17).

Although slavery was abolished in Brazil in 1888, its structures still permeate the Symbolic of Brazilian society, and the idea of *nonfellows* persists. A Black female

³⁹ Translation from Portuguese: “Enquanto durou o tráfico de escravos, foram os senhores ‘indiferentes à duração da vida de escravos... o escravo, trabalhando um anno, além de plantar e colher para o sustento, dava produto líquido que cobria pelo menos o seu valor: do segundo anno em diante tudo era lucro. Portanto, para que se preocuparem muito com eles, quando era tão fácil obter novos por preço baixo?’”

subject has the lowest *place* in the matrix of Brazilian society. Following Kilomba, Ribeiro emphasizes this *place*:

[B]lack women, because they are neither white nor men, occupy a very difficult place in white supremacist society because they are a kind of double lack, the antithesis of whiteness and masculinity. Black women, from this perspective, are neither white nor men, and would perform the role of *Other of the Other*.⁴⁰ (Ribeiro, 2017).

At the same time, Lacan says that “[t]here is no Other for the Other.” (Lacan, 1977, p. 311) – consequently, Black woman exists not as “the Other for the Other” – but as a sort of *double lack*. Neither man nor white; neither the woman (who also doesn’t exist for Lacan as a universal construction), nor a particular subject as subjectivity is denied for a Black woman by the big Other. De Jesus is speaking from this twice non-existent *place*.

The *place* of De Jesus is favela. It is hard to call it her home because Carolina wants to break out from there. Still, she portrays the place she inhabits along with her daily life, following the strategy that Black women-writers often choose: “the home, like ‘community and nation[,]... is often a place of exile for the woman’ and... black women’s writing deconstructs ‘mystified... romantic... [and]... idealized’ conceptualizations of quotidian life” (Boyce Davies apud Schindler, 2014, p. 74). Carolina is at odds with her surrounding and daily life. She lives in a shack with no water tap; she has to collect paper to pay her living and must work even at days when she is ill. Favela, with its ground covered by human feces and inundated with domestic violence made public, looks as an uncanny home in the Freudian sense, although De Jesus explicitly avoids calling it home: “I arrived in the favela: I don’t think I can say I arrived in my house. A house is a house. A shack is a shack” (De Jesus, 2003, p. 40). The uncanny – *Unheimliche* – is the opposite to homely (*heimlich*). In the very literal sense,

⁴⁰ Translation from Portuguese: “mulheres negras, por serem nem brancas e nem homens, ocupam um lugar muito difícil na sociedade supracista branca por serem uma espécie de carência dupla, a antítese de branquitude e masculinidade. Mulheres negras, nessa perspectiva, não são nem brancas e nem homens, e exerceriam a função de Outro do Outro.”

the favela home is *not homely* (*unheimlich*). If we compare home with favela, the opposition will be precisely as in the pair *Heimliche–Unheimliche*. *Heimlich* is interpreted as “not strange, tame, dear and intimate” (Freud, 2003, p. 126) – the favela is uncanny. It is very strange and lacking intimacy; its residence lack solidarity as De Jesus writes (De Jesus, 2016). Favela, as something uncanny (*unheimlich*) is not “arousing a pleasant feeling of quiet contentment” (Freud, 2003, p. 127). In favela, people are unhappy, it is impossible to feel safe and relax in shacks. Furthermore, favela is neither “concealed, kept hidden” (ibid., p. 129): in favela, the private life is exposed. Favela is a sort of uncanny home in the sense that Schelling puts in it: “Uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open.” (Schelling apud Freud, 2003 p. 132). Actually, favela has everything that can be found in a regular home: domestic violence, alcoholism, everyone being alone despite living together. Even human feces are laid bare before people’s eyes. So, it makes depiction of favela a depiction of home, although an uncanny one. In a way, *Child of the Dark* can be considered as the point of the departure of today’s Brazilian literature if we assume that “the future of Brazil as a modern nation lies in folding depictions of the home and of the women who occupy that space into a redefined national ideology.” (Schindler, 2014, p. 79). Today, a Black woman ceased to be portrayed as a miserable favela resident – it was a long way since De Jesus rebelled against this depiction.

Any achievement of a Black woman is too much and too little at the same time – too much for someone in her *place* and too little to be accepted in the Symbolic. Regardless, de Jesus refuses to accept both imposed insufficiency and excessiveness by the simple fact of keeping her diary. What matters to her is the mere possibility for a Black woman to write, the “theoretical faith” that she can create a text by herself and thus change the Symbolic by entering it. Kojin Karastani claims that “the regulative idea... functions heuristically.” (Karastani, 2003, p. 52). He illustrates it with the example of Norbert Wiener, the founder of cybernetics, talking about the Manhattan Project:

“[He] said that what was treated in the counterintelligence community as the real secret was... the fact that it had *already* been made. When both Germany and Japan were developing the *idea* of making the bomb, they would have succeeded in its production had they discovered that it was *possible*. (ibid).

De Jesus believes that it is possible for her to write – and this belief transforms the alleged impossibility into a feasible task. She doesn’t mention any role models of hers whose images could inhabit her Imaginary – we can assume, she didn’t have any. Nevertheless, she adopted the idea of becoming a writer and committed to it. By so doing, she made the Real intertwine with the Imaginary and cause and effect inseparable from each other. Did the belief in the possibility of being a writer make De Jesus write? Did her practice of writing make her believe that she could be a writer? We don’t know, but it doesn’t matter. What matters is that the combined forces of the Real and the Imaginary can grapple with the Symbolic and impose structural changes on it; make the impossible possible; bring a book of a Black author from favela to bookstores and academia.

Neither “a Black woman”, nor “a woman from favela”, nor “a semi-illiterate person” do characterize De Jesus in her totality. On the opposite, they tend to reduce her to a simplified two-dimensional stereotype. De Jesus simultaneously is and is not preoccupied with either of the epithets. She is both proud to be Black and internalizing some of white people’s stereotypes about Black people. She lives in a favela but strives to leave it for a better life. She makes grammatical and orthographical mistakes, but still does write her diary, seeing it as a way to survive – the pattern that we have already seen in Jerebtsova’s diary.

Just like Jerebtsova, De Jesus seeks to enter the Symbolic – this entrance is crucial for both authors to survive, although they choose different strategies to achieve this goal. While Jerebtsova internalizes the Islamic Law, De Jesus constitutes her own dimension of the Symbolic. Survival which both authors strive to achieve as a result of being inscribed into Symbolic Law is different. Jerebtsova endeavors to be indistinguishable from the other; she internalizes the Law of the other to be subject to this Law; to gain its protection and therefore save her life. De Jesus seeks to be the self, not the other

and chooses therefore to separate herself from the idea of her that the Other has; she objects to the Law of the other and creates her own dimension of the Law. By writing and not hiding it, she goes against the grain: “When I’m nervous I don’t like to argue. I prefer to write. Every day I write. I sit in the yard and write” (De Jesus, 2003, p. 15); “José Carlos heard Florentina telling that she thought I was crazy, because I write and don’t get anything for it” (ibid, p. 85); “I went to the shoemaker to collect his wastepaper. One of them asked me if my book was communistic. I replied that it was realistic. He cautioned me that it was not wise to write of reality.” (ibid., p. 99). Her writing looks weird and foolish to the fellow favela residents due to the traditional negative view of Black women intellectuals described by bell hooks:

Many Black females, myself included, described childhood experiences where the longing to read, contemplate, and talk about a broad range of ideas was discouraged, seen as frivolous activity, or as activity that indulged in too intensely would lead us to be selfish, cold, cut off from feelings and estranged from community... Early sexist socialization that teaches Black women, and indeed most women, that mind work must always be secondary... (hooks, 1991, pp. 155–156).

On the one hand, De Jesus obeys this rule and only writes after having completed all the other duties. On the other hand, she rebels against it by her very writing: she is not supposed to write whatsoever not only because she is Black, but also because she lives in misery and has little to no education. Regardless, she continues doing what she is driven to – she writes. De Jesus pursues her intrinsic desire to inscribe herself into the Law; she is also creating it by herself, portraying the vices of favela people along with the critique of the whole state system, inequity, and prejudice she encounters. When writing, the author is constituting her idea of Law to which she is subject; the Law where she can get rid of “internalization – or, better, the epidermalization – of [her] inferiority” (Fanon, 2008, p. 4). At the moment when she is depicting her observations, De Jesus experiences herself as a subject with her specific opinions, life events, dreams and prospects; she feels the particularity of self and keeps returning to her diary to feel

it again. The way Fanon described it: “I am not a potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself as a lack. It *is*.” (ibid., p. 103). De Jesus writes both to escape generalization (or being a potentiality) and to *be* the subject she is by means of language.

From the outset De Jesus affirms her being an independent subject who is able to draw the line between herself and generalized idea of favela people. This difference between herself and those around her is the source of her empowerment and frustration of her neighbors. She consistently refuses from alcohol to maintain her independency. She is also proud to be different:

My kids are not kept alive by the church’s bread. I take on all kinds of work to keep them. And those women have to beg or even steal. At night when they are begging I peacefully sit in my shack listening to Viennese waltzes. While their husbands break the boards of the shack, I and my children sleep peacefully. I don’t envy the married women of the favelas who lead their lives like Indian slaves. (De Jesus, 2003, p. 8).

De Jesus is sensitive about the gender issues. She sees the Symbolic structure the Real: men exercise force over the women, and white favela residents use any opportunity to show that they are “better” than Blacks: “Silvia’s daughter, a girl of six, passed by and said: ‘You’re writing again, stinking nigger!’ Her mother heard and didn’t say anything. It’s the mothers that put them up to it.” (De Jesus, 2003, p. 19). The author points out the systematic character of racism in favelas: it is the way children are taught to think by their parents (letting do a wrong thing for her is an equivalent of instigating). De Jesus refuses to argue with Silvia and documents the situation in the diary instead. Just like Jerebtsova, she uses her writing as a weapon and retribution. Unlike Jerebtsova, she uses her diary to create new Symbolic order – and this entry bears the idea that it must be free from racism unlike the favela of Canindé. Citing Bizarra de Andrade:

“Even in Canindé, racial barriers are clear, inequality is clear... racism... divides those already peripheral, demonstrating that racial ideology reproduces,

among the most vulnerable, even deeper levels of submission, overlapping in other identity attributes positioned in places of less power, such as the female gender.”⁴¹ (Bizarra de Andrade, 2018, p. 38).

One more instance of critique by De Jesus and the consequent gaining of political subjectivity:

There are people here in the favela who say that I’m trying to be a bigshot because I don’t drink *pinga*. I am alone. I have three children. If I got the alcohol habit, my sons will not respect me. Even writing this I’m doing something stupid. To conclude: I don’t drink because I don’t like it, and that ends it. I prefer to put my money into books, rather than alcohol. (De Jesus, 2003, p. 66).

De Jesus sees clearly that favela people dislike this distinction and assume that she thinks of herself as superior, which is not true. She wants to be the self without adhering to anyone’s expectations from her; she wants to make her own choices; she knows her motivation and doesn’t feel she owes anyone an explanation. Although this choice can lead to her being excluded from community, she still chooses being a subject over the sense of belonging. By so doing, De Jesus steps on the root of liminal nonbelonging along with Jerebtsova. Carolina does not belong fully to favela because her opinions and behavior differ from those accepted among her fellow favela residents. At the same time, she continues to be one of them, lives in the same space, and suffers from the same misery. The famous Kantian dilemma “your money or your life” here can be altered to “your subject or your community” where no one cannot choose one without losing both – the classical case of *veI* as stated by Lacan. Here is what Zupančič writes on *veI* and the dilemma of Kant:

It is well known that Lacan placed what he calls the “*veI* of alienation” at the origin of subjectivation – this *veI* is his “logical operator” expressing the logic of the forced choice, the classical example of which is: “Your money or your life”.

⁴¹ Translation from Portuguese: “mesmo no Canindé, as barreiras raciais são claras, a desigualdade é nítida... racismo... divide os já periféricos, demonstrando que a ideologia racial reproduz, entre os mais vulneráveis, níveis ainda mais profundos de submissão, imbricando-se em outros atributos identitários posicionados em lugares de menor poder, como o gênero feminino”.

This, of course, is an impossible choice, since if I choose the money, I lose both, but then, if I choose life, I get life without money – that is, life deprived of the means to live it. The paradox of the forced choice comes from the fact that one of the alternatives between which we are required to choose is at the same time the universal (and quasi-neutral) medium of choice itself; it is at one and the same time the part and the whole, the object of the choice and that which generates and sustains the possibility of choosing. It is for this reason that we must choose one alternative if we do not want to lose them both – that is, if we do not want to lose the possibility of choice itself. (Zupančič, 2000, p. 215).

If Carolina chooses the community, she will have no subject – consequently, nothing that could *belong* or make this choice. If she, on the opposite, chooses the subject, she will be excluded from community – and belonging is the only way to survive. The subject is the analogue of life in “your money or your life” *vel*, and Carolina chooses her being as a subject to keep the possibility of choice and be *subject* to subjectivation. At the same time, her superposition of liminal nonbelonging differs from one of Polina. Polina must belong or make the Other believe that she belongs in order to enter the Symbolic Law and consequently keep her life. Carolina must detach herself from the Other to be a subject and claim to create the new Symbolic order. To do so, she as a subject must undergo alienation.

It starts with a certain degree of estrangement that De Jesus adopts when depicting the favela realia. To develop a critical notion, she must create some distance between herself and favela, take on a point of view combining the pain of belonging to the group where something is not going right and a person who can observe this “not right” without being overwhelmed. The diary creates a buffer zone between the surroundings of the author and the author as observer (both of herself and the others). Writing serves as a safe space, a viewpoint, and a place of her subjectivation. In writing she, therefore, expresses the critique of favela customs:

Dona Silvia came to complain about my children. That they were badly educated. I don't look for defects in children. Neither in mine nor in others. I know that a child is not born with sense... What infuriates me is that the

parents come to my door to disrupt my rare moments of inner tranquility. But when they upset me, I write. I know how to dominate my impulses. I only had two years of schooling, but I got enough to form my character. The only thing that does not exist in the favela is friendship [in original: solidarity]. (De Jesus, 2003, p. 8).

The author sees the others and herself with estrangement. She looks at her neighbor complaining about Carolina's children and doesn't involve into quarrel. Instead, De Jesus ponders on what could cause the difference in life approaches of herself and Dona Silvia. She finds it in the inability of the favela people to own themselves and take the position of the observer of their instant desires. Unlike Carolina, they have no buffer zone between their inner and the outer world. De Jesus sees no opportunity of solidarity for people who are unable to realize themselves in their subjectivity, which promotes personal to the political scale. As Christopher Lane puts it in the preface of *The Psychoanalysis of Race*: "...alienation exists irrespective of political circumstances because it represents an ontological condition". (Lane, 1998, p. 4). Nevertheless, I would argue that in the case of De Jesus alienation (or, better, estrangement, the first step of becoming an alienated subject) is a necessary condition of becoming a political subject. It is the estrangement that helps her see the lack of solidarity and the systematic oppression. By situating herself in this reality, De Jesus assumes political posture, and through writing she consequently becomes a political actor.

Her estrangement makes De Jesus have a perspective on favela (her *place*) that encompasses its universal position. In the end of *Child of the Dark* she writes: "What I have noticed is that nobody likes the favela, but they need it." (De Jesus, 2003, p. 174). The statement is relevant both for the favela residents who have their *place* here and make part of the Symbolic by occupying the lowest position in the hierarchy and for white middle-class people who need to know that they are higher than "those from favela" and enjoy their belonging through the nonbelonging of the racial other.

When discussing *bairros*, Spanish-speaking quarters in the U.S., Patricia Gherovici compared them to the *ghetto*:

The etymology of the word has been disputed; some interpretations link it to the Hebrew word *get*, the act of separation or divorce... As a metaphor, “divorce” describes quite well the multiple situations by which whole communities still find themselves pushed into secluded estrangement in closed urban spaces as a result of a social, legal, or economic pressure. (Gherovici, 2018, p. 1).

The quote is also relevant for the favela realia: it is a systemized pressure that puts the whole favela community to estrangement. The city of São Paulo is arranged strictly: “The Governor’s Palace is the living room. The mayor’s office is the dining room and the city is the garden. And the favela is the backyard where they throw the garbage.” (De Jesus, 2003, p. 24). The bigger the symbolic capital, the more luxurious room corresponds to a neighborhood.

De Jesus sees herself as a person dominating the language well. She writes: “Here all the women pick on me. They say that I talk too well and that I know how to attract men.” (De Jesus, 2003, p. 15). Elzira Divina Perpétua, a famous researcher of works by De Jesus, notes that the latter refers to her language as “‘classic Portuguese’ or simply ‘the classic’”⁴² (Perpetua apud Guimarães Martins, 2017, p. 40) and testifies: “Several people seek me out to talk to me. They say I speak Portuguese admirably well. I make no mistake in speaking”⁴³ (ibid.). De Jesus feels in contact with the language, she sees it as her strength and is empowered by writing – and the language obeys to her as she ties herself tighter to the Symbolic. However, it is far from typical in the sight of the white Other constituting the Law. White people pretend on universality, Kilomba notes: “...white subject [places] our discourses back at the margins, while their discourses remain at the centre, as the norm... they have facts, we have opinions” (Kilomba, 2010, p. 28).

The same happens to De Jesus. In the epistemology created and dominated by white people, not only cannot she as a Black person be recognized as an author or a valid

⁴² Translation from Portuguese: “‘Português clássico’ ou simplesmente ‘o clássico’”.

⁴³ Translation from Portuguese (original spelling): “Varias pessoas procura-me para falar-me. Diz que eu falo admiravelmente bem o português. Não erro no falar”.

producer of speech – her very ability to dominate the language is subject to doubt. “A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (Fanon, 2008, p. 9) – and the whole Symbolic resists to admit that a Black author can own both the language and the world. The Law is there to make sure that nobody allows for a mere possibility of it.

In case of De Jesus, it is the famous editing by Audálio Dantas that play the policing role and prevent the Law from incorporating and canonizing the Black author. In his preface to the Brazilian edition of *Child of the Dark*, Dantas claims to have left the text intact, allowing only for minor punctuation and spelling corrections and omissions of unnecessary repetitions. What he really does, reaches far beyond the minimal corrections and lays bare the strategy of the Symbolic sabotaging any attempts of being changed by means of the Symbolic. Disclaimer: when analyzing the editing strategies of Dantas, in no case do I exercise any personal critics on him. I am regarding him as an attorney of the Symbolic.

What do we imagine when thinking of the results of the editing process? A revised text which has been improved: errors and typos corrected, logical incongruences highlighted and discussed with the author, style refined and homogenous (for conventional texts which don't aim to challenge the artistic form). And what was the result of the Dantas's editing?

First, he chooses to keep the orthographical and grammatical errors in the text of De Jesus. However, this decision contains a lot of compromise. As states Leticia Guimarães Martins, he still mentions having corrected some spelling:

...the journalist confesses that he interfered in the spelling of Carolina de Jesus: he stated that he had excluded the *cedilha*, which was often “unnecessary” and justified the addition of the letter <h> in *há*, as the author, with the intention of using the 3rd person singular present indicative of the verb to *haver*, used to write <a>.⁴⁴ (Guimarães Martins, 2017, p. 35).

⁴⁴ Translation from Portuguese: “Ainda no prefácio, o jornalista confessa que interferiu na grafia de Carolina de Jesus: afirmou ter excluído a cedilha, por muitas vezes “desnecessária” e justificou o

On the one hand, the editor decides to keep the errors. On the other hand, he corrects some of them. Any reasoning we could impose on him would be speculative: does he want to maintain a certain estrangement between the text and the reader? to emphasize the fact that the author has no formal education? to show that ideas have value regardless of the way they are expressed? It can be any of it and many more. As a result of the editing, the Portuguese version of the text is visibly full of errors, but legible (and more *cedilhas* and *há* substituted with <a> would hardly make it completely illegible). The point of interest here is the approach to the editing. When working with a text of a “regular” writer (who more often than not is white and holds a university degree), a person with some symbolic capital, an editor usually opts for the strategy of total correction, so that the text corresponds to the language norms. When editing the text of a Black author from favela who has two years of schooling, the opposite choice is made. The one which emphasizes the lack of domination of the language; the one that shows the author as detached, disconnected from it. The one that highlights the difference between the book by the Black author and a “regular book” which does not contain a tenth of all the errors to find in *Child of the Dark*. When Fanon writes about language, he makes an example of white people “talking down” to Black people, imitating their accent and overly simplifying their speech: “to talk pidgin-nigger is to express this thought: ‘You’d better keep your place’.” (Fanon, 2008, p. 21). In a way, Dantas can also be considered to “edit down” De Jesus. He edits her text in a way that is “appropriate” to show the difference between her written language and the language of an “average” writer.⁴⁵

acrescento da letra <h> em há, pois a autora, com o intuito de usar a 3a pessoa do singular do presente do indicativo do verbo haver, escrevia <a>.”

⁴⁵ Symptomatically, in his translation of *Child of the Dark*, David St. Clair doesn’t stylize the English version of the text as “poorly written”. He uses simple constructions and phrasal verbs (for example, “put up to” vs. “instigate”) but doesn’t add any grammatical or orthographical errors on purpose to make the text reflect its “original tone”. He finds it enough to keep the corresponding rhythm and wording to transmit the intonation of the author. If he considered misspelling as a part of an experimental form, he would be supposed to stylize the text according to the authors idea (just like translators do with *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes). Lev Olevskiy, Oleksandr Stayetskiy and Lidia Egorova also don’t keep any spelling errors in the Ukrainian translation of *Child of the Dark* (De Jesus, 1964), obviously not perceiving it as a part of the book’s stylistic or avant-garde form. What helps to see the redaction by Dantas from another angle is the approach of Lélia Gonzalez, a researcher, covered by Ribeiro: “The thinker also confronted the dominant paradigm and in many of her texts used language

The words that Dantas chooses are also questioned by some researchers of De Jesus. Perpétua who researched many works by De Jesus assumes that Dantas simplified her text:

[T]he editor [has an] intention to compose an image of the author different from that which appears in the manuscript... the editor eliminates any supposed erudition or even neatness in Carolina's language when he replaces her deletions with more popular terms. Thus, a procedure based on the likelihood process is observed, that is, on the adequacy of an image of Carolina to her social condition. The examples demonstrate that substitutions help to build the stereotype of a popular character, with little education, and occur as a result of the editor suppressing a large part of what the writer has that is different from the people in her environment, that is, the interest in books in general and in everything that concerns formal education, for what she considers a world of "culture".⁴⁶ (Perpétua, 2011, p. 64).

This opinion is supported by Guimarães Martins who researched the approach to the editing of one handwritten notebook by De Jesus. As we remember, Dantas claimed to omit some passages to avoid unnecessary repetition and making the text "exhausting" for the readers. Still, Guimarães Martins testifies that the criterion of omission is not revealed by the editor. In her dissertation, she compares two versions of the same fragment by De Jesus. It concerns the entry of December 13, 1960:

without obedience to the rules of normative grammar, giving visibility to the linguistic legacy of people who were enslaved." (Ribeiro, 2017). (*A pensadora também confrontou o paradigma dominante e em muitos de seus textos utilizou uma linguagem sem obediência às regras da gramática normativa*¹¹ dando visibilidade ao legado linguístico de povos que foram escravizados.) So, the approach of Dantas might contain this component of disobedience, an attempt to go against the grain of the Symbolic.

⁴⁶ Translation from Portuguese: "[O] editor [tem uma intenção] de compor uma imagem da autora diferente da que aparece no manuscrito... o editor elimina o que possa haver de suposta erudição ou mesmo de escoreito na linguagem de Carolina quando substitui suas supressões por termos mais populares. Observa-se, assim, um procedimento com base no processo de verosimilhança, ou seja, na adequação de uma imagem de Carolina à sua condição social. Os exemplos demonstram que as substituições ajudam a construir o estereótipo de uma personagem do povo, com pouca escolaridade, e ocorrem em vista de ter o editor suprimido grande parte do que a escritora possui de diferente das pessoas de seu meio, ou seja, o interesse pelos livros em geral e por tudo o que diz respeito à educação formal, pelo que ela considera um mundo de 'cultura'."

A nortista woman was complaining that she and her sons are going back to the interior because they couldn't find jobs here in São Paulo. They're going to pick cotton. I felt sorry for her. (De Jesus, 2003, p. 131).

There are some sentences omitted in this passage. In the manuscript it looks as follows (the highlighted sentences are absent in the published text):

A Nortista woman was complaining that she and her sons are going back to the interior because they couldn't find jobs here in São Paulo. **That they are hawkers. But when they go out on the street, they can't resell what they bought because of the tax authorities. That they're going to pick cotton.** – I felt sorry for her. I have **already** picked cotton. I felt sorry for her **because those who work in the fields do not see an advantage in the work because there is an intermediary.**⁴⁷ (Guimarães Martins, 2017, p. 36).

In the originary text we see the background of the nortista woman sons and the narrator's logic: "the reason for the feeling of pity felt by the author was erased from the final text, leaving the reader a free interpretation of her opinion regarding work in the field, which is consistent with a character without the capacity for judgment."⁴⁸ (ibid., p. 38). Revealing the author's way of thinking would have hardly made the text more monotonous, repetitive or exhausting. On the contrary, it would have expanded the reader's vision on her, her experience, life knowledge and even political views. Speaking in psychoanalytical terms, the Symbolic is impeding the racialized subject to reveal itself as a subject. At the stage of symbolization, the racialized subject has to be subject to symbolic castration – realize her lack and have it exposed; lose the dignity that she never had in the eye of the Other. As a Black author from favela, De Jesus cannot publish a book on regular terms (having it edited to perfection and gaining

⁴⁷ Translation from Portuguese: "A Nortista começou queixar-se que os seus filhos vão voltar para o interior porque não encontram serviço aqui em São Paulo. Que são marreteiros. Mas quando saem a rua não podem revender o que comprou por causa dos fiscais. Que vão colher algodão. – Fiquei com dó da nortista. Eu já colhi algodão. Fiquei com dó da nortista porque quem trabalha na lavoura não vê vantagem neste trabalho porque tem intermediário".

⁴⁸ Translation from Portuguese: "Neste exemplo, o motivo da sensação de pena sentida pela autora foi apagado do texto final, deixando ao leitor uma interpretação livre sobre sua opinião quanto ao trabalho no campo, que condiz com uma personagem sem capacidade de julgamentos."

personal symbolic capital as an author). She has to lose a part of her speech along with a part of her subjectivity and also, she has to have her lack (of mastering the language) exposed.

The edited text contains far less traces of the narrator's individuality than the manuscript, erasing her personality and making her resemble the "collective voice of the poor" that is often mentioned by critics, marketers, and researchers. It must have started with Dantas. In his preface to *I'm Going to Have a Little House (Casa de Alvenaria)*, he describes a talk between De Jesus and another favela resident who asked her to mention the fact of people in the South of Brazil having racial prejudice:

It is a significant appeal, this one from the little black guy from Pelotas. It demonstrates, without the need for new arguments, what this black woman coming from the dunghill represents in the collective unconscious: a voice of protest.⁴⁹ (Dantas, 1961, p. 9).

Not only does he diminish the author, but also links her with two sorts of collectivity at one and the same time: the one of collective unconscious and the one of some common voice of subaltern people haunting the white unconscious. I would argue that it is precisely the white unconscious implied in the Dantas's words. He cannot imagine that people see De Jesus as a figure of power; as a person with symbolic capital – not an incarnation of some collective being but someone who finally came to be heard. It is *her* decision if she puts something into her diary or not; she receives a personal request to do so – no assembly of Black favela people is happening there. It is the white people whose collective unconscious is afraid of protest, seeing it as a flood of the Real that can destroy (and therefore restructure – or destructure) the Symbolic. As Perpétua notes, *Child of the Dark* was an "intentionally predetermined act of giving the publication a value of collective and not particular representation of the misery

⁴⁹ Translation from Portuguese: "É um apêlo significativo, êste do pretinho de Pelotas. Demonstra, sem necessidade de novos argumentos, o que essa negra vinda do monturo representa no inconsciente coletivo: voz de protesto."

and abandonment of the favela residents.”⁵⁰ (Perpétua, p. 66). This collective representation is nothing else than stereotypization of both people from favela and Black people; reducing them to the set of characteristics; making them resemble one another; gluing them together into a homogenous collectivity. It leads to a paradoxical situation in which the stereotype defines the race and at the same time makes it non-existent. On the one hand, anybody who belongs to a race should, in theory, possess a set of stereotypical qualities (those *others* are all the same). On the other hand, due to the same condition, the race is empty because its characteristics are empty as well. No embodiment of racial stereotype exists for the stereotype erases every feature of a living being. It *lacks* – and lacks “precisely because race emerges as/at the site of lack... The lack, which racial identity both marks and attempts to cover, also creates ripe conditions for stereotypes.” (Friedlander, 2022, p. 111).

Maybe in the fifties, the perception of stereotype was different than today – and some things were acceptable that today ceased to be so. For instance, today the formulation of the book’s subtitle “diary of a favela resident” (*diário de uma favelada*) is regarded as diminishing the author to her situation. Nevertheless, this approach is criticized by people who find it inappropriate to apply today’s standards to the events which happened sixty years ago.

As Eliane Brum puts it in her *El País* publication:

Among the main “accusations” against Audálio is the fact that he treated Carolina as a “writer from favela”, as if the fact that she lived in the favela was what gave her value, which would have limited the understanding of her immense literary talent; the fact that he edited Carolina's diaries, suppressing parts that are now considered essential... Audálio is guilty of all of them... He really did it all. But it's too easy to look at a relationship established between two people at the turn of the fifties and sixties through today's lens. Could Audálio have done it differently? This question is essential for any honest

⁵⁰Translation from Portuguese: “um ato intencionalmente predeterminado de conferir à publicação um valor de representação coletiva e não particular da miséria e do abandono do favelado”.

debate on the topic. And I doubt Audálio could have done it any other way... How many people would read the report if its name were “The drama of favela written by Carolina Maria de Jesus”, unknown and indistinguished person (by the standards of the time), instead of “The drama of favela written by a favela resident”, the title effectively published?⁵¹ (Brum, 2021).

Brum makes an important point: times have changed, and nowadays the thing that used to be a distinguishing act of solidarity can be perceived as diminishing and tokenistic. De Jesus’s status of “favela resident” was precisely what made the book sell and be read: people wanted to know the “inside” of favela seen not by an outlier, but by insider. And now, to label the author as a “person from favela” obviously means to reduce her to her social condition. It also used to function like that before: slavery used to be considered “normal” by white capitalists, and after it had been abolished, segregation came to be considered “normal” in some countries. The notion of “normal” is continuously drifting towards equity, but somehow can never reach it. At any time, in any epoch, there is always a gap between the equity and the current situation.

Sixty years ago, De Jesus wrote:

How many things I wanted to do
I was hampered by prejudice
If I extinguish I want to be reborn
In a country where black people predominate.
Goodbye! Goodbye! I will die!

⁵¹ Translation from Portuguese: “Entre as principais ‘acusações’ a Audálio está o fato de ele ter tratado Carolina como uma escritora ‘favelada’, como se o fato de ser favelada fosse o que conferisse valor a ela, o que teria limitado a compreensão de seu imenso talento literário; o fato de ter editado os diários de Carolina, suprimindo partes que hoje são consideradas essenciais... Audálio é culpado de todas elas... Ele realmente fez tudo isso. Mas é fácil demais olhar para uma relação estabelecida entre duas pessoas na virada dos anos cinquenta para os sessenta com as lentes de hoje. Audálio poderia ter feito de outro modo? Esta pergunta é essencial para qualquer debate honesto sobre o tema. E duvido que Audálio pudesse fazer de outra forma. Quantas pessoas leriam a reportagem se o nome fosse ‘O drama da favela escrito por Carolina Maria de Jesus’, uma não ilustre (para os padrões da época) desconhecida, em vez de ‘O drama da favela escrito por uma favelada’, título efetivamente publicado?”

And I leave these verses to my country
If we have the right to be reborn
I want a place, where the black is happy⁵²
(De Jesus, 1996, p. 33)

One cannot discord that in the last sixty years, the world has made a huge progress in terms of human rights; a lot has been done to reach the equity — as well as one cannot discord that it hasn't yet been reached. Structural racism still permeates society on multiple levels; the Symbolic still hasn't been transformed into a fair system without oppression and prejudice. As we can conclude from the story of *Child of the Dark*, it is precisely because the Symbolic cannot be transformed by mere means of the Symbolic. The methods of the Law are traditionally thought to be the best to bring legitimate change – reformation, not revolution can change things steadily, but for good. The Symbolic does allow for changes if they are made by its own means: the book by De Jesus has been published, translated into many languages, and sold well. However, the degree to which the Symbolic lets itself be changed is always limited: no changes are supposed to dismantle the status quo. In other words, the Symbolic resists drastic changes that are needed to achieve equity. The aim of the Symbolic is to always leave some space for hierarchy. The exact same thing happens to De Jesus: it is possible for her to publish the book, but it must be full of errors and therefore have a lower place in the hierarchy. Her words will be read by the public, but perceived as a “collective voice”, not her own (the author is merged with the group which doesn't

⁵² Translation from Portuguese (original spelling):

Quantas coisas eu quis fazer
Fui tolhida pelo preconceito
Se eu extinguir quero renascêr
Num país que predomina o preto.

Adeus! Adeus! Eu vou morrer!
E dêixo êstes versos ao meu país
se e que temos o direito de renascer
Quero um lugar, onde o preto é feliz

happen to the authors with symbolic capital). Her book exists but is denied a status of literature, although many other diaries are granted it without any doubt.

The Symbolic is never enough to change itself. The Symbolic restructured by means of the Symbolic will still maintain the status quo. No matter how far they take the progress and bring nearer the equality, the situation will still resemble one of Achilles and the tortoise: some tiny gap will be still there. For instance, it is impossible to overcome racism by taking mere symbolic steps like having better laws or education. The racism is not an issue of not knowing as Todd McGowan demonstrates it in *The Racist Fantasy* when discussing the phenomenon of so-called *unconscious bias*:

...if racism is unconscious, this means that the problem is not simply a deficit of knowledge but a surfeit of enjoyment. People enjoy at odds with how they know. That is to say, they enjoy not in spite of knowing better but because they know better. (McGowan, 2022).

The Symbolic cannot be completed with any additional knowledge or structure which will then resolve the problem. The problem is inherent to the Symbolic, it is its part, and the tools of the Symbolic will never dismantle its house.

In *Child of the Dark*, the subject enters her alienation which, in Lacan's thought, is the necessary condition of subjectivation. First of all, "the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the other, the subject proceeds from his synchronic subjection in the field of the Other." (Lacan, 1998, p. 188). Then, he continues developing idea of the subject as a signifier effect:

If the subject is... determined by language and speech, it follows that... the subject begins in the locus of the Other, in so far as it is there that the first signifier emerges... A signifier is that which represents the subject. For whom? – not for another subject, but for another signifier... The subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other. But, by this very fact, this subject – which was previously nothing if not a subject coming into being – solidifies into the signifier. (ibid., pp. 198–199).

It is crucial that Lacan puts the emphasis on the subject's being determined by speech (especially when we speak about the racialized subject). This is why Kilomba describes the writing of Black people as political act, a rebellion against the "*mask of speechlessness*" (Kilomba, 2010, p. 16) that was imposed on them by the institutionalized racism:

I am not the "Other", but the self, not the object, but the subject, I am the describer of my own history, and not the described. Writing therefore emerges as a political act... as I write, I *become* the narrator, and the writer of my own reality, the author of and the authority on my own history. In this sense, I become the absolute opposition of what the colonial project has predetermined. (ibid., p. 12).

De Jesus has the same perception of her writing. When she was already sure that her first book was coming to light, she wrote in her second published diary: "Now I speak, and I am heard. I am not a dirty black from favela anymore."⁵³ (De Jesus, 1961, p. 17).

The Symbolic is continuously trying to take the subjectivity of the author away. It is visible in the producer vs. product dichotomy which is brought up constantly when discussing the texts by De Jesus. In the unsigned "necessary preamble" (*preâmbulo necessário*) to *My Strange Diary* (*Meu Estranho Diário*) the question is asked: "Could she really have been a *product*, something manufactured for a particular moment in the market?"⁵⁴ (De Jesus, 1996, p. 9). Perpétua also writes in these terms when discussing the redaction by Dantas:

To achieve [the] objective, it was necessary for the editor to adapt the narrator to a subject model that converged on a character who, in addition to being integral, strong, resigned and attentive to the community's problems, was also submissive, passive, without the capacity to judge. commitment, without inner

⁵³ Translation from Portuguese: "Agora eu falo e sou ouvida. Não sou mais a negra suja da favela."

⁵⁴ Translation from Portuguese: "Será mesmo que ela teria sido um *produto*, algo fabricado para um momento do mercado?"

freedom – in short, a product and not a producer of a destiny. (Perpétua, 2013, p. 66).⁵⁵

The choice of words is essential here. Leaving alone the fact that producer has agency and product not, producer is a living being in the first place, and a product is a *thing*, a *commodity*.

Carolina's subject emerges as an effect of her book, which is a signifier in the locus of the Other. It is only because the book that the author becomes visible for the Other. At the same time, her subject solidifies in this book. She is seen as a producer of misspelled text (semi-illiterate), a racialized other (Black), and someone who doesn't belong to the space of the Symbolic and must return to her place (favela resident). This solidification impedes De Jesus to be seen and accepted by the Other. At the same time, it also reduces her to a set of stereotypes and situates her in the hierarchy of literature. Opinions like the one below used to circulate in Brazil not only at the time of publication but even thirty years after:

It is clear (and it should have been at the time) that those manuscripts... have no literary value, because they do not transcend their condition as a biography of collecting paper and beans (when there were any) in the daily life of a favela.

The texts have at most documentary value, of sociological or even psychological interest... anthropological or even psychological, considering once again the "Carolina case" as one of compulsion to write, need for art or things like that.⁵⁶ (Felinto, 1996).

⁵⁵ Translation from Portuguese: "Para cumprir esse objetivo, foi necessário que o editor adaptasse a narradora a um modelo de sujeito que convergisse para uma personagem que, além de íntegra, forte, resignada e atenta aos problemas da comunidade, fosse também submissa, passiva, sem capacidade de julgamento, sem liberdade interior – enfim, produto e não produtora de um destino."

⁵⁶ Translation from Portuguese: "É claro (e deveria ter sido na época)... não têm qualquer valor literário, porque não transcendem sua condição de biografia da catação de papel e de feijão (quando havia) no cotidiano de uma favela.

Os textos têm no máximo valor documental, de interesse sociológico... antropológico ou mesmo psicológico, em se considerando novamente o "caso Carolina" como um de compulsão para a escrita, necessidade da arte ou coisas do gênero."

The reference to ethnography is curious here as today it has an explicit colonial status. Usually, it used to be a white ethnographer who was describing the racialized other through his optics, trying to "make sense" of the "nonsense" that the life of the other looked like to him.

Journalist and writer Marilene Felinto didn't think the text by De Jesus to be literature at the time. Audálio Dantas wrote: "Her diary constitutes an interesting documentary of life in the favela."⁵⁷ (Dantas apud Perpétua, 2013, p. 10). Researchers will both repeat it after him and then argue this point of view by suggesting "placing her alongside renowned names such as Guimarães Rosa and Clarice Lispector, instead of relegating her to the limbo of 'testimony' and 'document'." (Dalcastagné apud De Amorim & De V. Moreira, 2018, p. 28). This oscillation regarding the possibility to consider the texts by De Jesus literature is nothing else than the attempt to situate the signifier of her book among the other signifiers. It is "too different" to be incorporated into literature and therefore is attributed to the liminal space of testimony and documents (which once again returns us to the liminal nonbelonging of the subject who is too different to be completely included and still has a reason not to be completely excluded). This difficulty to situate *Child of the Dark* also illustrates the *modus operandi* of colonial epistemology: "The themes, paradigms and methodologies... reflect not a diverse space for theorization, but rather the specific political interests of white society." (Collins apud Kilomba, 2010, p. 29). Ribeiro gives more background of the situation:

[W]hoever had social privilege has epistemic privilege, since the valued and universal model of science is white. The consequence of this hierarchy legitimized the Eurocentric epistemological explanation as superior, granting modern Western thought the exclusivity of what would be valid knowledge, structuring it as dominant.⁵⁸ (Ribeiro, 2017).

What is literature, what is a document and what is the borderline between them?

Who decides on significance of these terms?

After Carolina's subject becomes solidified in the field of the Other (the book is published and situated in the field of literature), the alienation is complete. "Alienation

⁵⁷ Translation from Portuguese: "Seu diário constitui interessante documentário da vida na favela".

⁵⁸ Translation from Portuguese: "[Q]uem possuiu o privilégio social possui o privilégio epistêmico, uma vez que o modelo valorizado e universal de ciência é branco. A consequência dessa hierarquização legitimou como superior a explicação epistemológica eurocêntrica conferindo ao pensamento moderno ocidental a exclusividade do que seria conhecimento válido, estruturando-o como dominante."

consists in this *ve/*” (Lacan, 1998, p. 210) – the impossible choice in which the subject cannot choose one option without losing it. The alienating *ve/* of Carolina in this case is the choice between being accepted in the Symbolic and calling for social change by means of her book. She can have neither of that. She is not inscribed into Symbolic law because the colonial Other (and their epistemology) doesn’t let her in. A Black favela resident who cannot write without errors is refused the entrance. She cannot instigate social change with her book either because it is impossible to make sufficient changes in the Symbolic with its own tools. As Copjec clarifies, the subject “coincide[s] not with the signifier, but rather with its ‘misfire’.” (Viego apud Friedlander, 105). Moreover, “the subject is constituted not by the signifier’s success, but rather by its failure to confer a complete identity” (ibid.). It is precisely what happens to the book and to the subject throughout this chapter.

The end of the subject’s formation happens, according to Lacan, in the process of separation when “the subject comes to recognize that the Other – the very Symbolic system to which the subject appeals for its identity – is itself lacking.” (ibid.). And it happens to the subject of Carolina.

This recognition happens, for instance, when she speaks of politicians who invade the favela when they need the votes of its residents and then do nothing to improve their lives:

When a politician tells us in his speeches that he is on the side of the people, that he is only in politics in order to improve our living conditions, asking for our votes, promising to freeze prices, he is well aware that by touching these grave problems he will win at the polls. Afterward he divorces himself from the people. He looks at them with half-closed eyes, and with a pride that hurts us. (De Jesus, 2003, p. 30).

The narrator is no longer enchanted by the false promises. She knows that the Other lacks because the whole Symbolic system doesn’t care to change the situation of favela residents. On the contrary, favela along with all its misery is a part of symbolic structure, and it is meant to be miserable. The lack is inherent for its hierarchy; it is not

whole and can never be: “In our country everything is weakening. The money is weak. Democracy is weak and the politicians are very weak.” (ibid., p. 31).

Life convinces Carolina (and the reader along with her) that it is impossible to change the Symbolic by means of the Symbolic. Nothing that implies hierarchization can help overcome racism: neither the abstract notion of equality that implies hierarchy to then reject it, nor concrete biological or historical facts that are supposed to educate people. It is the joint work of the Real and the Imaginary which can help. As for the Symbolic, McGowan has an idea regarding how the racist fantasy can be abolished: “Overcoming the racist fantasy... is the fundamental antiracist gesture: enjoying one’s own nonbelonging instead of the nonbelonging of the racial other.” (McGowan, 2022). It draws us back to the idea of liminal nonbelonging as the ultimate human condition. Every living being has a ground for nonbelonging, consequently, every living being is capable of making the fundamental antiracist gesture. The component of the Real in this abolition is experiencing one’s nonbelonging, living through it, once being in the shoes of the other. This is what both De Jesus and Jerebtsova do on the daily basis; this is what makes them write and what makes a significant input into their subjects’ constitution. Citing McGowan once again:

There is no subjectivity without lack, no one who achieves wholeness. The absence in the signifying structure – the position of nonbelonging within the social order – provides the enjoyment of lack that we misidentify, through the racist fantasy, as a complete enjoyment. The racist fantasy causes us to see an absence of constraint where there is actually an enjoyment of absence. This confusion is the lifeblood of the racist fantasy. Unravelling it must be at the foundation of any antiracist project. (McGowan, 2022).

In this chapter, we saw Carolina Maria de Jesus constitute her subject through alienation. Writing helped her assume an estranged position towards generalized idea of favela resident and criticize both the Symbolic Law and fellow favela residents.

Through estrangement she became a political subject, and producing speech helped her gain agency.

De Jesus sought to enter the Symbolic which makes her situation similar to the one of Polina Jerebtsova from the previous chapter. In order to achieve her goal, De Jesus attempted to constitute her own dimension of the Symbolic in her diary.

The subject of Carolina is alienated when she can neither being accepted in the Symbolic of the white people, nor provoke changes in it by means of her book. Her formation as a subject is complete through the process of separation when she realizes that the Symbolic also lacks. Its inability to acknowledge the Subject is inherent and cannot be overcome by means of the Symbolic.

As a problem of oppression and, consequently, hierarchy, racism turned out to be impossible to overcome by symbolic measures. Still, there is another strategy to fight it by combining the Imaginary with the Real. Any subject can overcome her racist fantasy by imagining herself as the one who doesn't belong, experiencing and enjoying it. This possibility is also implied in my idea of liminal nonbelonging as the ultimate human condition.

The Symbolic is known for structuring the Imaginary. Until the unravelling of the racist fantasy is complete, we will be able to imagine a lot of injustice – even at the scale of the universe, or the divine. De Jesus knew it well and could imagine a favela even in heaven:

I sent my thoughts towards the sky. I thought: can it be that people live up there? Are they better than us? Can it be that they have advantage over us? Can it be that nations up there are as different as nations on earth? Or is there just one nation? I wonder if the favela exists there? And if up there a favela does exist, can it be that when I die I'm going to live in a favela? (De Jesus, 2003, p. 42).

3. *The Buddhist* by Dodie Bellamy: Subject as a Self-Aware Product of Late Capitalism Fighting for Nonbelonging

I started my career as a copywriter in a tiny creative agency in Krasnodar – a city in the south of Russia: what a way to open a chapter about the subject of late capitalism! Actually, I was planning to open it with a quote from a website of that agency's then-competitor. Unfortunately, a most late-capitalistic thing had happened: the site had changed and doesn't contain the quote anymore (neoliberal logic says that everything has to change constantly to sell well and look desirable). However, I knew the old version like the back of my hand (it was quite witty, and I liked it). In the About section, just before the snapshots of the team, they wrote: "Not only are we what we do, but also how we look in photographs." A perfect phrase to sum up the idea of the subject in late capitalism: it is instrumentalized and reduced to a mere means of production, a tool. "We are what we do" – the subject equals a function – or, if we read it another way, the product of labor. At the same time, the subject of late capitalism is also "how she looks in photographs". The subject is reduced to an image, an image is deemed to represent the subject. If there are no photos to provide to the world, the subject might be announced as nonexistent. As Anna Kornbluh puts it:

A society of spectacle in which sociality transpires through eyes, it can often seem to individuals as though our work is the production of our own image, keeping up with self-manifestation while lacking most means to do so.
(Kornbluh, 2023).

This is the order Dodie Bellamy simultaneously embodies and fights in *The Buddhist* – a book based on her blog about her break-up with a man she calls the buddhist. As a professor teaching creative writing in the California College of Fine Arts, a writer and one of the originators of New Narrative literary movement, she is someone who *does* belong – unlike the two previous authors. And, unlike Jerebtsova and De Jesus, who strive to inscribe themselves into the Symbolic order, actively resisting this inscription, Bellamy is fighting for nonbelonging to constitute her subjectivity.

The nonbelonging is postulated already in the form of the book. *The Buddhist* is structured in a peculiar way. The author makes time go backwards: the book begins with *Unposted* fragments and gradually flows to the moment from which the text began. It is a sort of a parody on the formats of the newsfeed or the blog: on the one hand, we begin with the newest fragment and move towards the older ones while we read. On the other hand, it makes the text illegible. Paragraphs follow one another in a perplexing order, and on the third (or, better, the 143rd) page we finally understand that the book must be read the other way round: the first page appears to be the last one in the book. Here we are forced to feel the author's nonbelonging and strive to dismantle the Symbolic order; her being someone else than a regular respectable writer.

Being a total insider gives Bellamy knowledge of how to undermine the Symbolic from within. She begins to do so at the very beginning of the book, opening it with a sex scene which is unsettling both for the heroine to experience and for us to read:

As soon as he got inside me he shoved my ass up, and then he stuck his arms under my legs and pushed them back, on the either side of my head. I keep thinking of the human spider I saw in a movie, a possessed woman in an exorcist movie, her chest skyward, her head bent backwards, hands and feet on the floor in some arachnid yoga pose, she scrambles about on all four limbs at a preternatural speed. Or maybe a Dracula movie, a postmodern one, where Renfield moves from eating bugs to becoming one. There's no lube, so it hurts like hell. I'm remaindered of the lecherous Buddhist teacher I read about who fucked his students without lube, and I wonder if this is a Buddhist thing to do, to fuck without lube, something about not glossing over an experience. He thrusts deeper – OUCH – last week I was having a dinner with a colleague and she said, are you really going to get naked with him – at your age? (Bellamy, 2011, p. 12).

In this quote, Bellamy argues against the imperative to enjoy imposed on the subject of late capitalism at any given moment. In the words of Mari Ruti: "[Our society's ideology of good performance] focuses on enjoyment, touting the message that

whatever else we do with our lives, we must find a way to enjoy ourselves.” (Ruti, 2018). Sex is usually seen as one of the major sources of enjoyment and, in the very first page of *The Buddhist*, the heroine fails to enjoy it. The subject doesn’t belong; she can’t cope with a seemingly easy task: to be present during sexual intercourse (instead, the heroine is drifting in her thoughts towards the movies reflecting her weird posture) and to enjoy herself (which she is obviously not). The subject doesn’t fit into the neoliberal logic despite being the insider of the system which leads us to the condition of liminal nonbelonging relevant for all subjects described in this work. The heroine is a product (and a beneficiary) of late capitalism, but cannot relate to it completely, leaving some space for the subject’s divergence.

This ability to accept (and also expose) the dissatisfaction and lack of enjoyment goes against the grain of today’s social order. When discussing the transition from the society of sacrifice to the society of enjoyment, Todd McGowan argues that the latter rather sees dissatisfaction or non-enjoyment as a nuisance which can be rectified:

In this society [of enjoyment], subjects become increasingly incapable of experiencing dissatisfaction as constructive for social existence. Clearly, we continue to experience dissatisfaction today, but we tend to see this dissatisfaction as the result of a mistake, something that might be remedied, rather than that which constitutes us as subjects. (McGowan, 2004, p. 138).

Bellamy directs a searchlight on this uncomfortable feeling that dissatisfaction causes in late-capitalistic subjects. She doesn’t merely show but *makes us look* how her autoheroine fails to enjoy. What makes us look is the constant revealing that she performs throughout the book, not only narrating, but, in Joan Copjec’s terms, “casting the veil”:

[H]e was sending me all seductive boundary crossing emails, but he wouldn’t say if he was gay or straight or whatever. He said it didn’t make a difference, and I was all, on the contrary, it makes a great deal of difference. So, finally he admitted he’s straight, and my small audience of fellow writers eagerly nursed this new detail. Later I announced to them, the Buddhist has a partner – and

they nursed that. Then I told them that I read in the New York Times he was married! And they nursed that. Then he told me they weren't married, he'd lied on some insurance forms. News flash! (Bellamy, 2011, p. 33).

The reader cannot look away from Bellamy's autoheroine because of the endless revelation. She reveals unpleasant truths that can portray her as a stereotypical cheated woman (mostly perceived as pathetic within the late-capitalistic frame of reference). We see her having sex and being uncomfortable, longing for the buddhist, torn in pieces, mentioning him every now and then despite having declared: "the buddhist no longer exists for me." (ibid., p. 41). It is impossible to look away when Dodie sobs to the music of Dusty Springfield as it is something that usually happens behind closed doors:

I'd sit and listen to Dusty and cry and cry. She's good for that. And I don't see anything wrong with listening to Dusty and crying, all this bullshit about detachment... if your fullest expression of life at that moment is crying over Dusty, then I say go for it... this hierarchy of higher versus lower is bullshit. (Bellamy, 2011, p. 105).

Bellamy *owns* our look and commands it, forcing us to look at her, making herself not merely visible and seen, but being seen as a non-enjoying subject. She makes it evident that dissatisfaction, or lack of enjoyment, constitutes her as a subject. As McGowan puts it, "dissatisfaction is the engine behind desire for something else, something more than the existing social order has to offer" (McGowan, 2004, p. 138). Throughout the book, the subject of Bellamy's autoheroine is going to desire for something else outside the Symbolic order to which she fully belongs; she will be affirming her subjectivity by pushing the limits of the Symbolic and resisting its rigidity which seeks preserve the status quo.

Subject's formation occurs thanks to her interactions with the other – this is a classic idea of psychoanalysis interweaving with the idea of inevitable lack felt by a human being no matter how fine things in her life are going. Ruti summarized Lacan's ideas regarding social influence on both lack and constitution of subject in the following way:

He hypothesized that the void at the heart of human subjectivity is an inevitable byproduct of the process of socialization that molds an infant – who is initially a creature of unorganized bodily functions – into a culturally viable being... (Ruti, 2018).

In late capitalism, the interaction with the other that helps mold a subject is reduced to *gaze*. Being looked at – preferably, by many people, or being just visible, or even having a mere chance of being seen is what constitutes a subject. Constantly being online, producing numerous selfies, showing our happy face – producing and reproducing our own image in order to be seen, looked at, admitted to exist. So, Bellamy *makes us look* at her by exposing the love suffering and sexual life of her autoheroine along with some photographs. This is where Bellamy both assumes and transforms the Sartrean vulnerability⁵⁹ of being looked at. On the one hand, she accepts and parades her being vulnerable by bringing up what is routinely perceived as private. She makes the reader feel that her autoheroine is just a regular person having her weaknesses and being aware of this fact. On the other hand, this approach gains a political dimension if we assume the Lacanian stance regarding the phenomenon of the gaze, and it refers not to Bellamy or her heroine, but to the reader:

I take here the structure at the level of the subject, but it reflects something that is already present in the natural connection that the eye establishes in relation to light. I am not a point creature detecting my presence at a geometric point from which a perspective is visible. Yes, in the depths of my eye there is certainly a picture being painted. This picture is, of course, in my eye. And I – I am in the picture. (Lacan, 2004, p. 106)⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ “The look which the eyes manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are is a pure reference to myself. What I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches crackling behind me is not that there is someone there; it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without defense—in short, that I am seen.” (Sartre, 1978, p. 259).

⁶⁰ This is my translation from the Russian edition of Lacan’s Seminar XI: “Я беру здесь структуру на уровне субъекта, но отражено в ней нечто такое, что присутствует уже в той естественной связи, которую устанавливает глаз по отношению к свету. Я не являюсь точечным существом, засекающим свое присутствие в геометрической точке, из которой видится перспектива. Да, в глубине моего глаза живописуется, безусловно, картина. Находится эта картина, конечно, в моем

Lacan is talking about the relation between the subject who is looking and the object she is looking at. The subject looking at the picture (or, at this point, at Dodie's love suffering) is simultaneously seeing the picture (the suffering) and being inside it. The reader (or the spectator) is never totally outside of what she is looking at, she cannot assume a posture of total nonbelonging. It is rather a sort of liminal nonbelonging that makes the reader to be a part of what she reads. She can relate to Dodie's love suffering up to some degree, she has already experienced a sort of this suffering and desire to push the limits of the Symbolic order. And this liminal nonbelonging, the collectivity that emerges from the mere looking at the suffering of the other has political potential. By looking at the other, the subject admits the subjectivity of the other (the reader accepts the subjectivity of Dodie) and also experiences herself as a part of what she is looking at. Even if it is our nonbelonging to what we see, this nonbelonging is a part of the phenomenon. Lacan's anecdote about Petit-Jean illustrates this idea perfectly. At the age of 20, he was fishing in Brittany together with a local fisherman: "Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can... And Petit-Jean said to me – *You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!*" (Lacan, 1998, p. 95). But further, Lacan says that the can saw him: "in a sense, it was looking at me all the same." (ibid). In the episode *Seminar XI* of *Why Theory* podcast, Todd McGowan said:

Petit-Jean was trying to say: "You're nothing here, in this picture. You don't belong. You're just this bourgeois slumming it in the South of France". But Lacan says: "Actually, I do belong in the sense that my nonbelonging is part of

глазу. А я – я нахожусь в картине." (Lacan, 2004, p. 106). The reason why I didn't use the only English translation available to me (the one by Alan Sheridan) is the fact that its text says the opposite thing: "But I am *not* in the picture" which subverts the argument. I rely on the Russian translation more not only because of the logic of the Lacan's text, but also based on the discussion that took place in *Why Theory* – the podcast by Todd McGowan & Ryan Engley. In the episode *Seminar XI*, McGowan says: "This is page 96 in the English edition, so it's key that it's an English edition. Lacan says: 'No doubt, in the depth of my eye the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye' – and then we get Alan Sheridan's interesting edition – 'but I am not in the picture'. Which, of course, that sustains this idea that there is a kind of externality between me and what I'm seeing. But, of course, in French he says: 'Mais, moi, je suis dans le tableau'. There is no 'je ne suis pas', there is no 'I am not'. There is just 'I am in the picture'. So, he is saying the exact opposite". (Engley, R. & McGowan, T., 2024, 45:20).

what I'm seeing in the visual field... You never have this totally external relationship to what you're seeing. (Engley, R. & McGowan, T., 2024, 52:00)

The reader cannot completely retract herself from Dodie's ruminations, suffering, and uncomfortable sex. As a result, she experiences the memetic "I'm in this photo, and I don't like it" feeling. The reader does belong (even in the state of nonbelonging), but she is uncomfortable about it and would like to pretend that she doesn't.

Dodie accepts the necessity to expose her inner life to constitute her subjectivity and makes this exposure political:

To reveal or not to reveal – this is a core question for many writers. This business of women not suffering in public, of having a gag order when it comes to personal drama, such as a break up, connects back to larger histories of suppression, such as the literature of victimization, women not daring to speak of rape or incest (and I'm in no way suggesting that my current situation is in any way comparable to those violations), a harkening back to the whole notion that domestic space is private, what happens behind closed doors stays behind closed doors, and somewhere buried in there is the history of the wife being owned by her man and therefore she better keep her trap shut, and bourgeois notions of suffering with dignity – or dignity itself, how oppressive a value is that? (Bellamy, 2011, p. 48).

Unlike the previous two authors, Bellamy criticizes the existing Symbolic order from within, assuming the position of total insider. She has the knowledge and the power to formulate what is wrong with the Symbolic, while both Jerebtsova and De Jesus strive to be accepted in the Symbolic to survive in the first place. Although the state of belonging can provide one with a certain degree of safety and agency, it still strives to maintain the status quo and keeps female subject in subordinate position. To Bellamy, constituting her subjectivity means pointing at the injustice in the existing Symbolic order. To be a subject means to have political consciousness; to be uncomplacent with her belonging; one gains subjectivity when revealing the injustice, combating it at the existential level.

Bellamy refuses to employ the traditional strategy of “suffering with dignity” deemed for women in patriarchal society. Although traditionally, love is perceived a typically “female” field where a woman can express herself, there is still a certain framework for her to do it. A woman should be sensible, chest, ready to sacrifice herself for the sake of the loved one, humble, docile – there is quite a list of requirements for loving women.

The author dismantles the bourgeois notion of dignity by exposing the obsession of the autoheroine with the man she loves (similarly to what Chris Kraus does in *I Love Dick*). In their foreword to *I Love Dick*, Eileen Myles wrote some words that are applicable to *The Buddhist* as well. For instance, “a remarkable study in female abjection” (Myles, 2006, p. 13). Then they go on:

[F]or Chris, marching boldly into self-abasement and self-advertisement... was exactly the ticket that solidified and dignified the pathos of her life’s romantic voyage. In Chris’ case, abjection... is the road out from failure. Into something bright and exalted, like presence. Which is heaven for a performer—which is what this author is (ibid., pp. 13–14).

The Buddhist can also be considered a performative work. Bellamy mentions it herself: “My involvement with him throughout had overtones of performance art, in that a handful of others knew about him and eagerly awaited updates.” (Bellamy, 2011, p. 32). The story emerges as a blog in the first place, which makes it a real-time performance and creates an effect of presence for those reading it: *The Buddhist* is a text made for the others to read it, not for the sake of the author pondering herself in solitude.

Bellamy also criticizes performativity permeating late-capitalistic society at all levels. Even regular interactions with the other turn into performance for subjects of late capitalism in their strive to always show and do their best; to control everything and be in charge for their future. Dodie dislikes it about the buddhist:

Our stance on personas was one of the many ways the buddhist and I were polar opposites. He said that almost every human interaction was a

performance for him – and a big part of that performance was maintaining a mystique... The buddhist was interested in details of how I packaged myself. (Bellamy, 2011, p. 55).

Dodie doesn't share the buddhist's obsession with daily performance; with his strive to appear mysterious. She, on the contrary, reveals everything to liberate herself: she performs while criticizing the necessity to do so; following the late-capitalistic logic while criticizing it. Even though Buddhists are not supposed to lie, the buddhist performs his persona on a daily basis which can also be perceived as lying. The buddhist plays the role of a Buddhist while hiding from Dodie the fact that he is married or manipulating her. She criticizes his strategy along with the whole notion of necessity of performance. In late capitalism, one cannot just live her life: to do something (say, to be a writer) implies to comply with the public expectations from a writer. One must perform a writer to have a right to write. Performance defines what you can or cannot do:

Whereas I was not groomed for anything except to be a grill cook – until I got involved with the New Narrative crowd, where I was told that writing was a middle class occupation and if I wanted to be a writer I'd have to be more middle class. And they won, I have become more middle class, or at least more adept at passing. (ibid.).

We see a similar critique of performance in *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson. When writing about her pregnancy and the ultrasound technician showing her son's genitals, she goes:

Just let him wheel around in a sac for Chist's sake, I thought, grimly folding the genital triptychs into my wallet, week after week. Let him stay oblivious – for the first and last time, perhaps – to the task of *performing* a self for the others, to the fact that we develop, even in utero, in response to a flow of projections and reflections ricocheting off us. (Nelson, 2015, emphasis added).

The passage can be perceived as an uprising against not only gender performativity, but performativity in the broader sense: those "reflections ricocheting from us" can be

produced by any expectations, projections, and customs. Quoting Ukrainian philosophers:

[P]urely virtual corporeal self-realisation, dominating these days, implicitly forces a vulnerable human to seek performative forms of self-realisation, self-defence and self-preservation in the severe conditions of the late capitalism. (I. Meliakova, I. I. Kovalenko, E. Kalnytskyi & H. Kovalenko, 2021, p. 16).

Dodie accepted the rules and did transform to be accepted in the writers' circle, but this performativity, as unavoidable as it was, still seemed fake and excessive to her. Here we see the subject in the same contradictory situation. She obeys to the Symbolic order of late capitalism (Dodie performs as a writer, and here we see the Symbolic structure the Imaginary: social order defines the image that the subject reproduces), but, at the same time, she is "conflicted" about this submission. Bringing up this internal conflict transforms the subject into a problem of the existing order (the one bringing up a problem of the system becomes a problem herself):

And they won, I have become more middle class, or at least more adept at passing.

But, I've always been conflicted about that. My working class family had no ambitions to better themselves... My mother scorned friends and neighbors who tried to claw upwards into the middle class. The way we were was fine, we didn't need to be prissy and pretentious... The last few years of her life, when we grew close, she came to appreciate the beauty of having a middle class daughter – I was no longer a fuming heathen, I was well behaved and quiet and considerate and compliant... But I still hold an internalized, naive scorn of phoniness... (ibid.).

Bellamy also adds to her text some thoughts on feminism for performative purposes: it is for the others to read, not for herself to remember. Political texts are supposed to influence the others, to ignite a discussion, to change the world – not to remain in a desk drawer. The text's political message is quite explicit, just the way it could be in a performance.

Along with political ideas, Bellamy saturates her text with numerous details of late-capitalistic world – those bits and pieces of performativity that she scorns but cannot avoid. She drops the brand of her shoes “I sit down, take off my Fluevogs” (Bellamy, 2011, p. 135); or casually mentions the name of the restaurant where she met the buddhist for the first time: “we met in the Castro at a seafood restaurant called Catch” (ibid., p. 88); or lets the buddhist (and us) know the price of her glasses: “Then later that same evening he asked, out of the blue, ‘How much did you pay for your glasses?’ When I replied, somewhere between \$600 and \$700, he said, that’s what he figured.” (ibid., p. 55). This mixture of real-life events happening almost before our eyes, political message, and recognizable everyday logic (being curious about the brands that other people wear or the prices they paid for their belongings) eliminates the distance between the heroine, the writer, and the reader. In this work of presence, *The Buddhist* resembles a performance. As Kornbluh puts it, “Presence itself is the work.” (Kornbluh, 2023). Bellamy is extremely present when describing the parties she went to, her dates, and her love experiences. There is no (or almost no) aesthetic distance between the world of *The Buddhist* and the world of the reader who develops parasocial relationships with the author. This is an attribute of late capitalism:

The medium is missing. Conventionally, art takes up a discernable medium and takes creative distance from ordinary communication or banal functionality, making an appeal to the senses that reroutes common sense... In the current climate, though, art renounces its own project of mediation. Directness and literalism are the techniques; immersiveness and surety are the effects. (ibid).

Immediacy grips the reader’s attention: the less the distance between herself and Dodie, the harder it is to look away from her. Byung-Chul Han described this phenomenon as lack of distance:

Today, the network has become a special sounding board, an echo chamber from which all otherness, all strangeness, has been eliminated. True resonance presupposes the proximity of the other. Today, the proximity of the other gives way to this lack of distance that is characteristic of the identical. Global communication permits only the most identical – or the others only on the

condition that they are identical. Proximity has distance inscribed within it as its dialectical opposite. The elimination of distance does not generate more closeness, but rather destroys it. Proximity and distance are intertwined.⁶¹ (Han, 2018, pp. 14–15).

Curiously, the lack of distance also contributes to the liminal nonbelonging of the reader, even though it changes the way the reader relates to the text. The reader sees the subject but can neither feel the thrill of distance nor the joy of commonality brought up by Han and described by Pushkin in his letter to Vyazemsky:

Why do you regret the loss of Byron's memoirs? Devil take them, thank God they are lost!... The crowd greedily reads confessions, memoirs, etc. because, in their meanness, they rejoice at the humiliation of the high, the weakness of the mighty. When people discover any abomination, they are delighted: *"He is small, like us! He is vile, like us!"* – "You're lying, bastards! He's vile, but not like you – differently!"⁶² (Pushkin, 1982, p. 237).

When reading this late-capitalistic diary, we perceive the author neither as high, nor as mighty (the distance is destroyed). We also don't feel delighted when she is "small like us" or "vile like us": we fail to experience proximity because we are unable to feel the distance first. Still, the reader feels incredibly "at home" because of this power of identical. She knows the feelings (everybody fell in love at least once) and sees another person experience identical suffering at arm's length, as if she was looking through her friend's Instagram account. Due to this small gap of identical, the pain is familiar but harmless.

⁶¹ Translation from Portuguese: "Hoje, a rede transforma-se numa caixa de ressonância especial, numa câmara de eco da qual foi eliminada toda a alteridade, toda a estranheza. A verdadeira ressonância pressupõe a proximidade do outro. Hoje, a proximidade do outro cede lugar a essa falta de distância que própria do idêntico. A comunicação global consente somente mais idênticos – ou os outros somente na condição de serem idênticos. A proximidade traz inscrita em si a distância como seu contrário dialético. A eliminação da distância não gera mais proximidade, antes a destrói. A proximidade e a distância estão entretecidas." (Han, 2018, pp. 14–15).

⁶² Translation from Russian: "Зачем жалеешь ты о потере записок Байрона? Черт с ними! Слава богу, что потеряны... Толпа жадно читает исповеди, записки etc., потому что в подлости своей радуется унижению высокого, слабостям могущего. При открытии всякой мерзости она в восхищении. *Он мал, как мы, он мерзок, как мы!* Врете, подлецы: он и мал и мерзок — не так, как вы — иначе."

Kornbluh notes the prevalence of the first-person fiction in late capitalism and arrives at critique of autofiction:

Rather than building character, they [autofictionists] advance a protagonist who is the same as the author in name and circumstance and real friends and real family and, above all, real voice. Rather than narrativity and plot, they purvey first-person present-tense uneventful short-spans, just elliptical ruminations in real time. Redacting fictional construction, duration, and figuration, autofiction delivers identity, instantaneity, it-ness. (Kornbluh, 2023).

In late capitalism, there is a huge longing for authenticity; “all a circulation-forward, expressivist, authentic nonfictional immediacy” (ibid.). There is, indeed. These autoreproduction, autorepresentation, autoexposure presuppose an extreme degree of showing one’s “true self”. The truism of everybody being fake both on social media and in personal interactions makes people (writers included) share more and more of their personal life in pursuit of being true, authentic, real, raw. The goal although is never achieved. In our futile attempt to bring the true self to the world, we strive to catch the Real with the net of the Symbolic. The Real keeps dodging the net: we can never appear as true as we want to. At the moment when we transform our experience into speech, it ceases to be an experience and becomes a mere piece of content. The same thing happens to Dodie’s subject. In the *Unposted* section, there is a description of masturbation mixed up with a description of porn the heroine is watching on her laptop – the whole scene in present simple, in astounding sixteen lines. And in the next sentence she goes on with her buddhist obsession: “The buddhist used to live in the Bay Area.” (Bellamy, 2011, p. 141). It makes the reader notice the subject’s being split between the “I” who wrote the text and the “I” that is a part of the story. Both Dodie’s masturbation and the buddhist’s background are just topics for Bellamy’s writing; she describes both to make the story develop. There is no way to close the gap between the Real (the living “I”) and the Symbolic (the “I” in the text). All the episodes are placed into the text on purpose. What glues them together is the fact that the heroine decides to masturbate when she is writing about the buddhist and that porn actors on the screen “look vaguely like the buddhist.” (ibid.). The fragments

are combined for narration purposes. The “I” who writes decides to expose the “I” in the story because it fits this story well.

When criticizing the immediacy of art in late capitalism, Kornbluh quotes Amitav Ghosh’s opinion that “climate crisis is also a crisis of the imagination” and claims that it “might be extrapolated to encompass aesthetic inspiration as such. Immediacy’s abdication of art evinces this crisis.” (Kornbluh, 2023). I would argue with that: it is hardly the deficit of imagination that makes Bellamy write about herself. It must be rather the desire to reveal what is hidden from us described by Joan Copjec:

...the desire to cast aside every veil, penetrate every surface, transgress every barrier in order to get our hands on the real thing lying behind it. We seem to have installed in the modern world a new “beyondness”, a new untouchable, or a new secularized sacred; one that inspires a new desire for transgression. This secularized sacred does not originate in a belief in the existence of another world, but from the belief that what we want in this world always lies behind a barrier which prevents our access to it. (Copjec, 2006, p. 23).

The truth is that behind the veil, there is nothing to see. Autofiction and, in broader sense, the art of late capitalism doesn’t give us access to any truth, uniqueness, or the secularized sacred. They disappear at the very moment we move the veil away. The Real escapes the Symbolic that is trying to lay it bare. The shortfall of mediation described by Kornbluh is longing for the veil that would contour the Real. For the art, the Real exists just like the invisible man from the Wells’s eponymous novel: it can be discovered only while being covered (the invisible man had to walk naked because clothes revealed the contours of his body). At this point, Dodie’s subject is a true product of late capitalism shining in the searchlight of her blog and, later, her book. The subject is extremely exposed but still invisible; still split in the Lacanian way between the speaking “I” and the spoken “I”, and unable to overcome its being split. At the end of the day, what we see in *The Buddhist* is not the story of a woman’s love suffering. It is a story about the *woman who writes a blog* about her love suffering which already produces some distance. As stated by Ruti:

This doesn't mean that the person who writes and the "I" of the text are identical... We have no directed, unmediated access to our experiences, particularly when they're umpired by writing (language)... there's an element of fantasy, of the imagination, that enters into the telling of every personal story. (Ruti, 2018).

Covering the suffering and other "bad feelings", the way Mari Ruti called them, has been a strategy of oppression for a long time. *Veiling* (in broader sense) has been serving not only as a means of mediation, but also as a means of subjugation. For a long time, women had to write about themselves keeping in mind the image of themselves that a man expected to see. As argued by Deborah Martinson in her book about women's diaries:

The male "privilege" of reading, judging, and perhaps even amending diary entries makes women vulnerable to their control, makes them "cautious" of exposure, and makes them talented in both writing and concealing their lives in text... the diary's language distorts self-images as the writer reimagines the self on the page... she tweaks images of the self as she imagines the shadow of reader rifling the diary's pages. (Martinson, 2003, pp. 1, 11).

Bellamy rejects the *veiling* and constitutes the subject of her heroine as the one opposing to requirements and daring to be the anti-ideal: "an in-your-face owning of one's vulnerability and fuck-upness to the point of embarrassing and offending tight-asses is a powerful feminist strategy." (Bellamy, 2011, p. 35). Accepting and exposing her vulnerability helps Dodie constitute her subject as well:

...the notion of peace or happiness or selflessness or any other "positive" trait being the pot of gold at the end of our spiritual/therapeutic quest has made me want to puke in my mouth. I don't want to be miserable, but I also want to embrace the fucked-up, to move towards a maturity and strength that can include and express weakness and embarrassing content of all sorts without shame, to allow myself the full resonance of being a *female subject* (and all the

other categorical adjectives that could be applied to me) living in a fucked up nation, in a fucked up world, in the 21st century. (ibid., emphasis added).

Here she makes several important statements at once. Firstly, Bellamy claims that subjectivity requires accepting one's imperfectness and giving up attempts to reproduce one's invincible image: always happy and selfless, (or always chest and sensible, as prescribed for women in the patriarchal culture). She rejects covering up or *veiling* her imperfections and bad feelings, and it is a political act. Secondly, she states that it is the subject's right to be accepted in her mediocrity and usualness – not only by herself, but also by the other. This idea is deeply feminist in its core. As a subject, woman has her right on weakness, on imperfection, and on mediocrity. Women don't need to jump over their head to prove their right on taking space in the world. They can just be as they already are. They already are subjects because they are human beings. No matter how obvious this idea might sound, it still has a great revolutionary potential. Women are still judged much more strictly than men are. I think, here is the right time and place to quote America Ferrera's monologue from Gervig's *Barbie* on this topic:

It is literally impossible to be a woman... Like, we have to always be extraordinary, but somehow we're always doing it wrong. You have to be thin, but not too thin. And you can never say you want to be thin. You have to say you want to be healthy, but also you have to be thin. You have to have money, but you can't ask for money because that's crass. You have to be a boss, but you can't be mean. You have to lead, but you can't squash other people's ideas. You're supposed to love being a mother, but don't talk about your kids all the damn time. You have to be a career woman but also always be looking out for other people. You have to answer for men's bad behavior, which is insane, but if you point that out, you're accused of complaining. You're supposed to stay pretty for men, but not so pretty that you tempt them too much or that you threaten other women because you're supposed to be a part of the sisterhood. But always stand out and always be grateful. But never forget that the system is rigged. So find a way to acknowledge that but also always be grateful. You have

to never get old, never be rude, never show off, never be selfish, never fall down, never fail, never show fear, never get out of line. It's too hard! It's too contradictory and nobody gives you a medal or says thank you! And it turns out in fact that not only are you doing everything wrong, but also everything is your fault. (Gervig, 2023).

I would say that *Barbie* is a self-aware product of late capitalism even to a greater extent than *The Buddhist*. Bringing tons of profit to both film industry and Mattel, Inc. (the company owning Barbie), it simultaneously criticizes the unachievable standards imposed on women in late-capitalistic society. *Barbie* states that it is impossible to be a perfect woman in the way society demands from living human beings. Even the iconic doll who is considered to promote unrealistic beauty standards fails to meet these mutually excluding perfection criteria.

Bellamy demonstrates that women's never being enough is a corrupt logic. She claims the women's right on mediocrity which is an essential human right. Subject doesn't need to be perfect because subjectivity outweighs perfection. Until we as a society recognize it, we will dwell in the state described by Avram Alpert when talking about good-enoughness: "unequal social order creates unbearable tensions between those deemed great and those deemed expendable in the pursuit of greatness." (Alpert, 2022). If we put on this lens, women are those "deemed expendable" in the existing social order. Giving up the eternal pursuit of ideal, in this case, means resistance. This is what Bellamy does when discussing her desire to express weakness – she is *resisting* the late-capitalistic logic and constituting herself as a subject.

Bellamy's self-exposure is political. She objects the idea that "there is something about women that can never be covered up enough." (Copjec, 2006, p. 11) subtly present in the existing social order. It might be a physical *something* as Copjec argues in *The Object-Gaze*, but this is also true if we speak of women's thoughts, ideas, and so-called decent behavior deemed appropriate for a woman. To Bellamy, exposure dismantles bourgeois morality:

“Betrayal happens in private (usually), thus betrayal itself is less of a bourgeois sin than talking about it. In my rest belt working class heritage, if someone betrayed you, you would tell anybody within earshot what that son of bitch did to you... there would be no shame in it... Throughout I’ve tried to use my babbling about loss and betrayal as an opportunity to refine and promote a political/aesthetic position.” (Bellamy, 2011, p. 48, 49).

To Bellamy, writing itself is deeply political. Just like Jerebtsova and De Jesus, she sees producing speech as a weapon able to empower her and make changes in the world: “I don’t see how anyone can really write from a position of weakness. Sometimes I may start out in that position, but the act of commandeering words flips me into a position of power.” (ibid., p. 35). Writing is her tool of taking the world back, of harnessing the Symbolic and dominating in on its own field. Dodie strengthens her subjectivity while writing; writing liberates her from the buddhist and empowers her to overcome her suffering:

In writing about the buddhist here, I admit, there’s a passive-aggressive (bordering on straight up aggressive) impulse behind it. I gave him many opportunities to not have this be hostile, and he remained cold and patronizing, so at a certain point I was fuck this, my not writing about him, given my overall writing project, is remaining loyal to him, I had to perform an act of disloyalty. (ibid., p. 49).

Writing is not just a mere weapon, but also a means of restoring justice. It has not only creative, but also destructive potential: writing about the buddhist is potentially dangerous to him, even though Bellamy doesn’t disclose any details that can reveal his personality. Nevertheless, exposure of the other is seen as something that the other would like to avoid. Paradoxically, exposure is constitutive for the subject but destructive for the other; it gains the constitutive power only when owned by the subject exposed. The subject must expose herself in order to emerge; being exposed by the other is objectifying. The author respects the subjectivity of the buddhist but the lack of reciprocal respect of her subjectivity makes her do the writing and transform him into the object of her blog and, later, her book.

Dodie's subject is ambiguous. On the one side, she is powerful: she gets power from writing, constituting herself as a subject and grappling the Symbolic through her writing. On the other hand, this power comes from showing her abject to the world. Bellamy shows us that one doesn't have to be powerful in order to produce speech:

...to accept that one has to be strong, knowledgeable or responsible in order to speak is to assimilate Western capitalism's narrative of progress; it denies otherness and represses vast arenas of human experience. (ibid., pp. 34–35).

For as controversial as it may sound, the rebelling subject is weak, and being openly weak in late capitalism is perceived as disobedience. To be weak means to neglect the neoliberal idea that an individual is totally in charge of her own life; the idea that obscures the rigidity and injustice of the whole capitalistic system. To gain subjectivity in late capitalism means to refuse from the idea of the subject's omnipotence which "tells us that our efforts will in the long run be rewarded however bleak things might at first seem." (Ruti, 2018). It takes a lot of courage to take responsibility; but it takes even more courage to admit that a failure is possible and that sometimes we are impotent.

The idea of almightiness is very tempting, but the subject has to abandon it in order to know her limits; to know where she ends and where the other begins. It is alluring to think that one can do everything, but the impenetrability of the other's thoughts and desires highlights the subject's limits. Dodie cannot make the buddhist love her no matter what. No matter how loving and caring she is, her efforts are not rewarded. The late-capitalistic logic doesn't work. She accepts it, and this acceptance forges her subjectivity:

...I moaned to Kevin that I wasn't a loving person, if I had been more loving, the buddhist wouldn't have turned against me, and Kevin said I was plenty loving towards the buddhist, that he was a horrible boyfriend. Kevin said you are a loving person, you're difficult but loving, and you're making the mistake of not distinguishing the two. (Bellamy, 2011, p. 62).

For Dodie, love is a transforming experience which also contributes to her formation as a subject. Her love to the buddhist helps her feel her limits, encounter her weakness, expose it to the world and gain her strength through this exposure. All this journey of falling in love and letting go is her route to subjectivity. Unlike the two previous authors, the subject doesn't grapple with the whole system: neither with the Islamic order like in Jerebtsova's diary, nor with poverty and class oppression like in the diary by De Jesus. Bellamy shows the subject battle her unrequited love to the other – in late capitalism, everything boils down to individuality. It takes personal confrontation to constitute a subject, not uprising against the whole system; but somehow personal becomes political, and Bellamy comes to make a political statement within the diary devoted to her one-sided love. Here we once again come to the genre of autofiction and autotheory, the famous first-person writing of late capitalism:

...not only does feminist theory have a long history... of making the personal political and the political personal... there's an obvious parallel between breaking the patterns of straight (heteropatriarchal) culture and breaking the mold of "straight" academic writing. I've long thought that much of the best theoretical writing arises from a personal place. (Ruti, 2018).

To Bellamy, personal and political make up a sort of Moebius strip and cannot be divorced. It is clearly a rebellion against the late-capitalistic strive to shun everybody into the sphere of personal to keep people away from political life. Here is how McGowan describes this increasing privatization:

The more subjects become subjects of late capitalism, the more they turn away from public space and seek refuge in their private worlds. Even when capitalism requires that subjects interact with each other in relations of production, distribution, and consumption, it demands that they do so as private beings. (McGowan, 2016, p. 51)

If we look at late capitalism through this lens of total shift to the private, Dodie's exposure of her private life will get at least ambivalent. Parading her intimate feelings does indeed represent the notorious desire to "cast the veil" and deliver uniqueness to

attract the attention of the other. Simultaneously, this exposure lays bare the political impotency of late capitalism. To speak publicly about one's love life means to affirm the importance of the other in the subject's formation while "capitalism obscures the role the Other has in forming the subject and works to convince the subject that it exists first and foremost as a private being." (ibid., p. 52). Once again, we see the subject resist late capitalism with its own weapon despite being its flesh and blood.

Love is crucial for Dodie's subjectivation. At some point, she proves the thesis of Barthes true:

For a hundred years, (literally) madness has been thought to consist in Rimbaud "*Je est un autre*": madness is an experience of depersonalization. For me as an amorous subject, it is quite the contrary: it is becoming a *subject*, being unable to keep myself from doing so, which drives me mad. *I am not someone else*: that is what I realize with horror. (Barthes, 2011, p. 121).

The one who loves experiences her subjectivity at a very high level because the rupture between herself and the object of her love is painfully obvious. The other is impenetrable; the amorous subject has no access to the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of her loved one. She can influence nothing; cannot even stop thinking of the person she is in love with. This experience of amorous feeling and one's aloneness in it, the impossibility to fully transmit one's emotions and share them with the other foster emergence of the subject. Love suffering endows the subject with agency. *The more loving one*, probably the best-known poem by W.H. Auden, doesn't merely comprise self-sacrifice and resignation in the face of unrequited love that the subject cannot cease to feel. It is a manifest of radical subjectivity: the amorous subject prefers to stay a subject, not an object of love, even if it entails more suffering. The subject won't trade his subjectivity for reciprocity, however tempting mutual love is:

How should we like it were stars to burn
With a passion for us we could not return?
If equal affection cannot be,
Let the more loving one be me.

Bellamy sees love in the same way. To her, to be in love means to be a subject. She flips traditional gender roles: the woman becomes the one being in love, while the man is the object of love. The same is described by Barthes as a role switch in amorous relationship:

“the *object* of capture becomes the *subject* of love; and the *subject* of the conquest moves into the class of loved *object*. (There nonetheless remains a public vestige of the archaic model: the lover – the one who has been ravished – is always implicitly feminized.)” (ibid, p. 188).

The one in love is female, and the one in love is the subject – Bellamy states the same thing. She also states that suffering is something that makes the subject deeper and stronger, just like Auden and Ruti, the latter bringing this argument forward, into the field of the social: “When we’re feeling bad, we’re almost automatically looking for ways to break patterns of living that are causing our dissatisfaction.” (Ruti, 2018). Consequently, we can assume that unrequited love and love suffering also have political potential; love suffering contributes to formation of political subject. But first, we have to look into what love in late capitalism is.

From McGowan’s standpoint, capitalism trades love for romance. The difference between the two is that romance “never leaves the terrain of desire. The subject seeking romance sees in the other the possibility of the realization of its desire and thereby reduces the love object to an object of desire.” (McGowan, 2016, p. 180). It is the famous commodification of love that turns the other into an object which, when acquired, is supposed to fulfill one’s desire. Meanwhile, desire desires more desire and cannot be fulfilled with any object. So, with the time, the subject starts seeking for a new object (or for a way to refresh the old one): “Novelty is crucial to keeping love alive within capitalism.” (ibid., p. 179). As a result, love objects become interchangeable, commodified. Nobody is special because there are always more dateable individuals out there; in late capitalistic society, trauma of love is eliminated. Capitalism somehow manages to prevent us from loving the one and only person with the one hand, pushing us to want to love someone forever with the other.

Ruti develops this argument and criticizes the longing for relationship longevity inherent for neoliberal culture:

...our society's message is that enduring marriages are better than short-lived alliances regardless of how wretched these marriages are; longevity has become associated with relationship success to such an extent that a marriage that lasts is almost automatically deemed a success, whereas an intimate alliance that ends is considered a failure regardless of how revitalizing and electrifying in may have been. (Ruti, 2018).

So, both longevity and constant search for even more satisfying partnership are never fulfilling for the subject of late capitalism. In a way, they both can be seen as pursuit of ideal (ideal satisfaction or ideal marriage until death sets us apart) which is doomed from the outset. Both strategies are questionable, and both play into the hands of late capitalism. Funnily, this stalemate reminds me of the paradox discussed in the Russian independent media, now functioning in exile, that everything and anything “plays into the Putin’s hands”. Perhaps, big evil can benefit from everything. Meduza states:

Is it possible to not play into Putin’s hands? No. It’s not about you, it's about him... Putin is an autocrat with no ideology, so he is not constrained by any consistency considerations. His only goal is to retain power, and he is ready to justify it with anything. His regime is omnivorous: it can declare any values, from liberal to ultra-conservative, and appropriate any rhetoric, from neo-Marxist to Slavophile.⁶³ (Meduza, Signal email newsletter from September 2, 2023).

Capitalism can do the same. It sees no problem in declaring two mutually exclusive love strategies as highly desirable at the same time. Both endlessly looking for a perfect match and making one’s relationship last forever is profitable for capitalism

⁶³ Translation from Russian: “Можно ли как-нибудь не играть на руку Путину? Нет. Дело не в вас, а в нем... Путин — автократ без идеологии, поэтому он не скован соображениями последовательности. Его единственная цель — удержание власти, и он готов его обосновывать чем угодно. Его режим всеяден: он может декларировать какие угодно ценности, от либеральных до ультраконсервативных, и присваивать любую риторику, от неомарксистской до славянофильской.”

and dreadful for the subjects. This omnivorousness leaves no room for resistance, there is no strategy to oppose the love logic of late capitalism because it has coopted both options.

Bellamy dwells somewhere in-between the two extremums, a sort of the famous middle way that Buddhists see as the way to salvation. On the one hand, she is in love with the buddhist and so obsessed with him that it looks like transformative experience of love trauma. She wants to get rid of her love ruminations, she understands painful things about the buddhist but it doesn't help:

Today the longing came back... Perhaps longing is the wrong word, more of a sense of loss, and a frustration at my inability to talk to this person. Do I even want to contact him, if I dared hurl myself against his wall of hostility, what could I say, I guess I'd say, "Don't you miss me?" I miss you. My missing him wouldn't matter much to the buddhist, he'd see it at a passive-aggressive accusation. I've come to realize that my caring for him mattered much less than my appreciation of his caring for me... (Bellamy, 2011, p. 101).

She is obsessed with the buddhist, even though her feelings are not shared. She doesn't want to find anyone else out there to switch her attention; she doesn't seek for anyone better, although the shortcomings of the buddhist are obvious. Dodie loves him, although he denies her subjectivity and wants her to be his reflection (he wants Dodie to appreciate his care for her in the first place, not to be a loving subject).

On the other hand, Bellamy is married to Kevin Killian, a gay poet and playwright (so it is clearly not another heteropatriarchal marriage). She cherishes her spouse and their alliance:

I look at Kevin beside me, peacefully sleeping in the navy cashmere cap I bought him for his birthday – I get a hit of his otherness and his sweetness and it pangs my heart – with this incredible love, right here, that slaps me in the face on a daily basis, what was the point of the buddhist? (ibid., p. 140).

She has a lasting marriage where she is happy – so, Dodie kind of has both: a love trauma and a successful marriage. The trick is that neoliberal logic finds such

combinations impossible. Dodie gains subjectivity through hacking the system and doing the undoable within the late-capitalistic frame of reference.

Bellamy stays on Irigaray's position that love (or can we for now call it desire?) opens us up for something beyond our ordinary life and transcendence:

Longing for the other as a path towards the absolute means that we long for more than being(s) – we long for an incarnate transcendence. And this allows us to surmount some of the main dichotomies at work in our traditional Western philosophy: for example, existence-essence; nature-spirit; sensitivity-conceptuality; being-Being. If desire is that which determines our being present to ourselves, to the world, to the other(s), then most of the dichotomies which supported our past logic lose their usefulness and even their meaning. (Irigaray, 2019, p. 4).

Curiously, this unifying power of desire, its ability to remove dichotomies is diametrically opposed to the Buddhist point of view which sees the cause of suffering and split consciousness in desire. Still, Bellamy holds Irigaray's stance, not the (b)Buddhist one:

He's included very little of his personal life in his spiritual writing... My position... is how can you separate the two, ever... Spiritual versus mundane, high versus low culture, and of course the old mind versus body – they're bullshit divisions. The only way we know the world is through the imperfect fucked-up lenses of our personality and body. (Bellamy, 2011, p. 70).

There is no way to be "objective", no way to get rid of subjectivity, love, and desire. On the contrary, they are our only tools to actually know the world, to transcend dichotomies and to see that we *are* in the picture; that we belong to it even when we don't. To be a grappling subject in the world of late capitalism means to be created by it and to be resisting it at one and the same time.

In this chapter, we saw subject being constituted in the circumstances of late capitalism. Unlike the two previous authors, Dodie Bellamy constitutes her subject from the position of total belonging to the Symbolic order. She is a writer, a professor, a person with Symbolic capital. To constitute the subject, she assumes the posture of liminal nonbelonging. Although she belongs to middle class, she stems from the working class and can see her current ambient from estranged point of view, noting its shortcomings. She refuses to follow the neoliberal logic of performativity and chasing the success. On the contrary, Bellamy states that to be a subject means to have a right on mediocrity and weakness. She refuses from heteropatriarchal amorous relationships and uses love along with disobedience to constitute her subject.

Bellamy pushes the limits of the Symbolic from within and has courage to admit her liminal position. It is her “being in the picture” and “seeing the picture” that permits her to maintain a critical position. She consciously chooses for subjectivity, and it is a political act.

By exposing her vulnerability in writing, Bellamy gained her power:

I lied when I told the buddhist I wasn't a monster. I am a monster and that's why he fled from me. To be female and claim power – to want to be accepted on your own terms – to claim her vulnerability and fuck-upness as part of your power – you are a monster. (Bellamy, 2011, p. 118).

She is not afraid of being seen as threatening, inappropriate, or too self-assured, and we shouldn't. Let's be monsters, ladies! It looks ugly but feels good.

Conclusion

Every female subject is a conflicted subject – or, at least, that is the way identities are presented in the diaries that we analyzed. There is no complacency in any of three heroines we saw regardless of their social status and symbolic capital. To be a female subject is to see oneself out of place, to fight for one's right either to be accepted or to differ (or be accepted in one's divergence). Jerebtsova is seen (and presents herself) as a racial other in warring Chechen Republic. Through her diary, she constitutes her subject as impossible in the time and space of the warring Islamic region where a Slavic woman can only hope for survival, incorporating the Islamic law, looks and way of thinking. De Jesus represents herself as a double stranger: a black favela resident in the city and a self-reflecting person in the favela. She is a stranger in the Symbolic, too, as its hierarchy impedes her inscription into the Law. As a racialized subject, she must undergo alienation to complete her subject formation: she must see that the Other, the whole Symbolic Law is lacking and therefore can neither accept her, nor grant her the desired feeling of belonging. Bellamy is a total insider with her academic and writing career, but even to her, it is impossible to feel that she belongs to the system. She constructs her subjectivity through her fighting for nonbelonging, dismantling the suffocating norms of the Symbolic and resisting all the public expectations and decencies.

Conflict is essential for the constitution of a female subject in a diaristic form, be it an explicit external conflict or an internal one. It puts the subject in motion, makes her reflect on herself and the world, and imagine a better world for herself and the others. The famous “bad feelings” make female subjects write, think, and resist, no matter what. In order to be conflicted, the female subject needs the other, their gaze is the point of the departure of female subjectivation. “For women, God is always about the gaze”, Bellamy states (Bellamy, 2011, p. 140). I would broaden her statement (if it is even possible): for women, subjectivation is always about the gaze. Even if the subject is constituted through some sort of opposition or argument, there must be the other to argue with.

Female subjects, as we saw them in the diaries, have trouble to belong to any collectivity. They rather find themselves in the position of liminal nonbelonging as I called it, neither belonging fully nor failing out completely. Liminal nonbelonging seems to be the ultimate human condition: It is impossible to belong fully to any collectivity as it would entail dissolution of the subject in a sort of collective soup with no distinction between the individuals. Such dissolution is hardly reachable even if (who knows) anyone can find it desirable: even if Soviet Union, they failed to erase the individuality despite the constant fight against dissidents.

At the same time, it is also impossible to fail to belong completely. Even if somebody is explicitly marked as “the other”, they still share the physical space, the basic human needs, and the experience of human existence with those who do belong.

Consequently, even complete strangers have a ground to belong along with all grounds to not belong. It constructs the condition of liminal nonbelonging which is essential for the emergence of the subject. On the one hand, she must be a part of a collectivity so that she has a ground to criticize it and develop some emotions toward her surroundings. On the other hand, she needs to maintain an estranged position to be able to criticize herself, the other and the whole Symbolic, distinguish herself from the other, and have some perspective on what is at stake (herself included).

Despite being the ultimate human condition, liminal nonbelonging is essential for a female subject, never fully accepted in the Symbolic order. It helps her find agency in this position and see her source of enjoyment in her nonbelonging, not in the hypothetical confluence with the Symbolic order that is never going to happen. This borderline condition between inside and outside, belonging and nonbelonging is both the point of the departure where the female subject starts her journey and her destination point. When she arrives there, the female subject becomes a deliberate stranger; she discovers that her power lies in the difference between herself and the other. She is a subject because she is not the other. She fails to belong, but the other fails to belong as well. The difference is that she has courage to acknowledge it and to fight for her subjectivity, even if it means being all alone – at war, in favela, or in strict middle-class frames.

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