



## **I'm a Fatalist, But Not By Choice:**

On Frank Ruda's *Abolishing Freedom*

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### **Against Free Choice**

**I**t is almost impossible today not to be a consumer of the apocalypse, whether in films, novels, magazines, or TV series, or simply on the daily news. Against the multiple visions of the end on offer, one can only hope that, to cite the superb French slogan, itself an ironic updating of the utopian spirit of May '68, *une autre fin du monde est possible*, "another end of the world is possible." In the spirit of this graffiti, and against all odds, Frank Ruda proposes in *Abolishing Freedom* a comic fatalism. Turning around the mass market doom scenarios, his "good news" is that the worst has already happened: this is the central thesis of the book, and it is meant to jar. Ruda's truly is "another end," an end that came, as it were, before the beginning, and does not stop getting worse. According to the book's paradoxical logic (one can already detect the black humor), not only has the worst already happened, but it becomes even worse owing to our desperate and bungled attempts to flee from it. The defense mechanisms we marshal to avoid or forget about the worst makes the worst even worse. This recalls the predicament of the psychoanalytic patient whose symptoms, meant to shield her against traumas and mental suffering, end up taking over her life and causing even more suffering than they were supposed to prevent. Like a good psychoanalytic intervention, Ruda's thesis is meant not to confirm the apocalyptic mood of the present but to puncture a hole in its self-satisfied complacency. Ruda's fatalism aims to create a new sense of urgency by radicalizing the catastrophe in an unexpected direction. The conclusion to which the book leads might thus be stated, to vary a sentence of Freud: *We are far more screwed than we think, and the apocalypse may well be other than we imagine.*<sup>1</sup>

What is Ruda's diagnosis of our current predicament? First, it is important to avoid a potential misunderstanding of the title: the polemical target of *Abolishing Freedom* is not freedom as such, but the form of freedom which predominates in capitalism (or its contemporary version which, like God, has many names: late capitalism, pure capitalism, absolute capitalism, cognitive capitalism, neurocapitalism, neoliberalism, postmodernism, globalization, maybe even "postcapitalism"). This is the freedom of

choice, which, as Ruda argues, has become identified with freedom in general. The spontaneous philosophy of market democracy is Aristotelianism, where the power of choice is seen as integral to one's flourishing and a defining aspect of human nature (the more sophisticated target behind Ruda's fulminations against Aristotle is contemporary Aristotelians or Aristotelian Hegelians like John McDowell). In Ruda's eyes this is mere trophy freedom, something one shows off but does not fundamentally care about: the liberal subject enjoys the abstract power to choose at the expense of making any real decision or commitment. The truth of the freedom of choice, what Jean-Pierre Dupuy calls "supermarket freedom,"<sup>2</sup> is an inability to choose, a disinterest in the prescribed options, and, ironically, an atrophying of the capacity for freedom itself. As Ruda neatly puts it, "freedom of choice is really identical to a nonchoice that deadens freedom."<sup>3</sup>

This is Ruda's own extension of the Marxist critique of human rights as "Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham." The contemporary fetishism of choice (Renata Salecl provides a more extensive examination of its discontents in *The Tyranny of Choice*, also cited by Ruda) goes together with a pervasive disorientation and indifference. Elsewhere, elaborating on this thesis, Ruda diagnoses new perversions of freedom in the flexible neoliberal workplace: for example, enlightened managers giving their workers the "freedom" to decide when they take their holidays instead of having set vacation periods, with the proviso that they may do so only when the work is done; the effect is that vacations are constantly postponed and reduced if taken at all.<sup>4</sup> Or think of Jean-Luc and Philippe Dardenne's film *Two Days, One Night* (2014), in which the factory boss lets his workers decide for themselves whether to let their co-worker Sandra keep her job and sacrifice their year-end bonuses, or else keep their bonuses and fire Sandra. This kind of obscenities are not pathological deformations of a properly democratic form of free choice, but show what such freedom has always amounted to under the conditions of capitalist exploitation: the freedom to sell one's labor power on the market and the freedom from owning the means of production.

For Ruda, true freedom is closer to the experience of being constrained or compelled to act. I am at my most free when I feel that I simply have to do something, when I have "no choice." Against the contemporary dogma of choice, Ruda defends its radical opposite: predestination, fatalism, destiny. And against the idea that freedom is a capacity, he argues that it is something that escapes the already constituted powers of the self. Freedom is not something that we naturally possess, but rather something that must be invented anew, under the pressure of necessity, so that we become aware of what we are capable of only retroactively. A truly free act reveals itself as such only after the fact. Following this, Ruda criticizes any attempt to naturalize freedom, insisting instead on its "unnatural" and "impossible" character (although today isn't it the natural sciences that are leading the assault on freedom, reducing it to an epiphenomenon of deterministic processes?—one might say that Ruda wants to save both determinism from the ideology of free choice, and freedom from mechanical determinism). In fact, *Abolishing Freedom* does not want to abolish freedom at all but to radically rethink it, to make it into something surprising and paradoxical. Ruda's fatalism is a "fatalism without fate" (167), and this qualification makes all the difference. "Fatalism with fate"

(a phrase Ruda doesn't employ) would be a good description of the Greek tragic universe, where one is consigned to destiny by a primordial debt or curse (the *Atè*, the act of madness which brings down the tragic hero). If fatalism with fate belongs to the ancient world, then fatalism without fate is a properly modern notion: modernity is defined not by throwing off the shackles of premodern destiny and asserting the subject's autonomy, but by the way it preserves the old fate in a modified (i.e., negated) form. The ambition of *Abolishing Freedom* is to sketch a modern history of fatalism, by showing that fatalism has always been the flipside of authentically rationalist thought: it lays out a rationalist fatalist counter-history of the Enlightenment.

### **The History of Fatalism**

This history proceeds in four main steps, with a preliminary foray into Protestant theology. Ruda begins with the dispute between Luther and Erasmus on free will and salvation, favoring Luther's "inhuman" stance according to which God is an utter mystery and human salvation is a matter of unpredictable grace, as opposed to Erasmus's humanist argument that through good works man can enter into cooperation with the divine and contribute to his own salvation (he cleverly calls the latter "religion as capitalism"). In this Lutheran model, which is decisive for the book, faith is a Pauline event that strikes one from the outside and forces a reorientation of one's life. The moment of conversion is "something I would not have believed possible before experiencing it" (17), and freedom follows from this "impossible" rupture instead of being the arbiter of already given possibilities.

The rest of the book is devoted to working out this theology of fatal freedom in a conceptually rigorous and atheistic manner—and in what follows I am in no way doing justice to the richness and detail of Ruda's analyses, only trying to present the bare outlines of his argument. First, following Descartes, fatalism serves as a necessary corrective to hope and fear, in which our lives are held hostage by chance external events. Fatalism purges these passions through a more radical determinism: there is no need to hope or fear, since everything is already decided by God. The catch is that this God is so perfect that it radically transcends human thought; or rather, to use Lacan's felicitous term, God is the "extimate" kernel of thought, something that can and must be thought precisely as unknowable and unthinkable. Although our actions are predestined, we cannot know what God has in store for us: we are thus certain of a fate that remains entirely opaque. But, in a further twist, it turns out that it is through this very idea of an unknowable God that I can grasp my own freedom, the likeness of God in me, as also lying beyond my power. My freedom escapes me; it is not at my disposal; it dispossesses me of my already known capacities and self-experience. The crucial question then becomes that of understanding the relationship between embodied existence and this extimate freedom; or, to put it differently, between the natural world and something which, like God, can only be thought as "unnatural."

In order to avoid re-naturalizing freedom, Ruda argues that this relation is best conceived as an “unrelation,” and he turns to *Kant* to develop this idea more fully. Kant is read through the lens of his contemporary interpreter Carl Christian Erhard Schmid, and *Abolishing Freedom* does a great service in bringing back this forgotten figure. For Schmid, freedom emerges out of a struggle between two determinisms: natural causality, which reigns over one’s desires and inclinations, and intelligible causality, which determines moral action through adherence to universalizable principles, what Schmid calls “intelligible fatalism.” What is crucial for Schmid is not the autonomy of the moral law *per se* but the struggle between these competing fates. Human beings are the embodiment of “two determinisms that come into conflict” (96), which is to say, in Ruda’s vocabulary, that they are the embodiment of an “unrelation.” For there is no neutral ground from which to mediate or decide the conflict, only a parallax-like shifting between the combatants’ radically asymmetrical views of the battle itself. From the perspective of natural causality, the struggle of determinisms is something eternal, undecidable. It must go on forever, vacillating this way and that, and this impossibility of resolution is precisely the victory of the phenomenal side. From the perspective of the autonomous will, on the other hand, the struggle must come to an end, and the only way to forestall the bad infinity of the conflict is to conceive of its total cessation as an ultimate ending, “The End of All Things” (the title of a short essay by Kant, of which Ruda gives an extraordinary reading). The fantasm of the apocalypse is thus revealed to be a rational one, the demise of all things, including reason itself, being the only way for reason to represent its victory over the “eternal” conflict: this end is the very fate of reason.

With Hegel, the apocalypse gains a more precise meaning and the concept of rational fatalism comes to its completion. Not only can we never know what God has in store for us, but neither does He. The unknowability of God is reflected into God Himself. It is not only that we lack any access to the big Other’s machinations, but this Other is itself barred, inconsistent, lacking: the God of fate is dead. And God himself (i.e., reason) must admit this: it is the internal development of reason, in its self-recoiling movement, that ultimately leads God to avow His non-existence and Absolute Knowing to confess that it knows that it does not know—with the final twist being that this highest achievement of knowledge can never be integrated into its positive edifice but remains something impossible, inassimilable, “unknowable.” “Absolute knowledge is the knowledge of the impossibility of assuming an absolutely necessary rational insight” (125). Ruda’s Hegel, like those of Slavoj Žižek, Mladen Dolar, Fredric Jameson, and Rebecca Comay, is a thinker of reason’s internal resistance to itself and not of all-encompassing identity, of its repetitive bungling rather than its totalitarian sweep—turning around his detractors’ slur as the worst philosopher, Ruda wittily calls Hegel the philosopher of the worst. The discovery that reason is destined to encounter a limit that dispossesses it of its mastery and destroys whatever ground it was clinging to completes the conceptual development of rational fatalism. Fatalism without fate is necessity without a master plan.

And in a fourth and final move Ruda brings this notion up to date: arguably the best name for fatalism in the twentieth century was (and still is?) the Freudian unconscious. While the ego thinks it is free to make its own choices and decide the course of its life, its dreams and desires are manipulated behind its back by the unconscious. The unconscious is a new figure of destiny for a secular age (and, consistent with his concern for the worst, Ruda heroically attempts a rehabilitation of Freudian theory at what many consider to be its very worst: penis envy). But the unconscious is not simply, as some would have it, the repository of past traumas and infantile desires that dictate one's behavior in the present. Such a view would amount to a purely mechanical determinism. As with Hegel's self-annihilating God, there is no master plan at work in the unconscious. The past does determine the present but *how* it does so is entirely open: we are responsible for the unconscious fantasmatic frame that determines the way we react to and subjectivize traumas and other experiences; we are implicated in, without ever consciously choosing, the way the past determines us and the kinds of defenses we marshal against it. This unconscious decision, what Freud called the "choice of neurosis," constitutes a kind of fatal freedom, it is the new form that freedom takes after Freud. And perhaps, as with Luther, to intervene at this level will also require passing through an "abyss of despair" (28). It demands an act that is beyond one's willpower and already established capacities and so necessitates the long, self-alienating work of analysis—this would be one way of understanding Virgil's phrase that Freud placed at the head of *Interpretation of Dreams: Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo* ("If I cannot bend the Higher Powers, I will move the Infernal regions"). Ruda has given us, via a history of the problem of free will and determinism, a Protestant genealogy of psychoanalysis.

Descartes's thought of the unthinkable God, Kant's rational fantasm of the end of all things, Hegel's self-sacrificing Absolute, Freud's primally repressed unconscious: these are all figures of the worst, the worst that already happened and doesn't stop happening. This could perhaps be stated most succinctly in the following way: subjectivity is the worst, the worst thing that happens (to the subject); the subject is that which survives its own ruination, its own death. Or as Ruda puts it, "the fatalist gesture is the subject; it is the gesture of subjectivation" (129; emphasis in original). Together with Ruda, I would point to a small group of thinkers, "catastrophists" who are working on a shared set of problems, and have articulated in different ways this same theme. In the words of Oxana Timofeeva: "Catastrophe is meta-traumatic. It happens absolutely: at the beginning there is—there was—always already the end."<sup>5</sup> Or Mladen Dolar: "My proposal would be to consider not the apocalypse that stands as the impending catastrophe at the end, but rather the universal ruin that conditions and frames the beginning, inaugurating thought and being." And "Thought is the survivor of the nuclear disaster, its heir, its legacy, its inscription... It survives the apocalypse that conditioned its possibility."<sup>6</sup>

Lacan's reversal of Sade is pertinent here: through his heinous debauchery, what the Sadean libertine ultimately seeks is the destruction of the entire universe, in order to return it to the pure contingency of primary nature. In so doing the libertine sees himself as obeying the destructive law of Nature, and makes himself into its willing

instrument. What Sade fails to recognize, however, is that this catastrophic “second death” is not located in some future still to come (this the bad infinite of the libertine, who can never rape/torture/kill enough), but has already taken place. As Lacan puts it, “It is just that, being a psychoanalyst, I can see that the second death is prior to the first, and not after, as de Sade dreams it.”<sup>7</sup> Instead of being closed in on itself, reality is cracked from within, traversed by some piece of the catastrophic real—it is this real which the sadist conspires to avoid precisely by elevating it into an Other (a “Supreme Being of Wickedness”) whose destructive law he faithfully serves. In Ruda’s terms, the worst gets even worse. Against this apocalypse-fantasy, the apocalypse is the real catastrophe that makes reality lacking, inconsistent, cracked, something unexpectedly and irremediably open.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps no surprise that Ruda, too, refers to Sade: the book opens with a marvelous reading of a little known novella by Sade, *Florville and Courval, or Fatality*, about a woman who (for the details, see *Abolishing Freedom*) unwittingly kills her mother, has a child by her brother, is raped by her child, whom she subsequently kills, and marries her own father: a dizzying gymnastics of incest and murder. This is not anti-Oedipus but a sadistic hyper-Oedipus that out-Oedipuses Oedipus himself, and through its farcical exaggeration brings us back to the truth of the original. Oedipus is hardly the domesticating agent that Deleuzians make it out to be: it really is a thought of the worst.<sup>9</sup>

### **Best After the End**

How can we better understand the fatal freedom that Ruda espouses? Let us hazard our own rather simple example. One way might be through the concept of improvisation. Improvisation combines freedom with necessity and lack of a master plan: in improvising, one does not exercise free choice, but is compelled and constrained at every moment by the flow of a process whose constraints are themselves subject to revision. What is necessary springs from a contingent starting point, and contingencies are transformed into necessities as they become new rules that structure the ongoing movement. An order thus emerges without any preexisting blueprint, and the freedom lies precisely in the patchwork way this novel organization comes to be realized, rather than being the design of a detached sovereign will. Was an atheist God winging it with His creation?

To take a more down to earth case, think of Heinrich von Kleist’s classic essay “On the Gradual Production of Thoughts While Speaking.” There he distinguishes between two types of people: those who only start speaking once they have decided what they think, and those who do not know what they think until they start speaking. It is the latter that interests Kleist: he presents an anti-expressive theory of speech in which talking and thinking are woven together in a dynamic, improvisatory manner. Thought takes place out there, in the world, not in the head: thinking arises within and alongside the act of speaking, instead of words serving as the vehicle for already formed ideas. One never really chooses what to say or what one means: to speak is to expose oneself to

circumstance and contingency, to give oneself over to an anonymous drive that speaks “in you,” that follows its own trajectory in combination with the environment and the presence of others, in a way that can sometimes be surprising or unexpected but is nonetheless yours. The simple act of speaking constitutes a kind of everyday experience of fatalism without fate. And here we might consider Ruda’s advice concerning the worst. To the person who is neurotically vacillating, unsure of what he thinks or wants to say, and so holding his tongue until he can make up his mind—is this not the ultimate truth of self-expression, having nothing to say?—the despairing Rudean counsel would be: assume that you will never know what you mean, and speak as if you did not think and will never have a thought. Only then, when you open your mouth, is there a chance that a thought will be produced, in spite of your useless empty expressive self.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the book Ruda offers a number of slogans that serve as moral guidelines for the fatalism he defends, and which, incidentally, read as a hilarious self-unhelp book: “Start by expecting the worst! Act as if you did not exist! Act as if everything were always already lost! Act as if the apocalypse has already happened! Act as if you were dead!” and so on. One might wonder, to whom are these imperatives addressed? And how exactly are they meant to work? For the fatal subject, they will appear superfluous, for the liberal democratic one they will appear absurd; and, one might add, for the increasing number of those rendered superfluous by the system, who are effectively treated as if they were nothing but unemployed waste, they may seem all too apt. *Abolishing Freedom* stakes out an in-between position: its slogans aim at a fatalism yet to come and are intended to call into being a subject who does not yet exist (or rather, does not yet “in-exist”). Its subject is a preparatory one, and preparation is one of the key terms in the book: “The only way to prepare for becoming a subject...” (128); “So how can we prepare for the real movement that abolishes the present...” (172); “fatalism is an assumption that makes it possible to prepare for what one cannot prepare for” (9). Ruda’s is a philosophy of the interregnum. With his emphasis on preparation, one could read Ruda as repeating Luther’s gesture: his lesson is that what is needed today is not hope but despair. One must assume the worst for only by doing so is a space opened for something else to happen, just like “the salutary dimension of despair that prepared the advent of true faith” (115). To quote Timofeeva again: “It would force us to accept the fact of our real-time apocalypse, and to take it over as the only true revolutionary situation... Only when already dead, and facing no future, do we really have nothing to lose.”<sup>11</sup>

In the background of Ruda’s examination of fatalism and freedom is Badiou’s conception of the event and the subject who faithfully pursues its consequences via a truth procedure, and to go into Ruda’s notion of the fatal subject more fully would mean disentangling a complex debate involving Ruda, Žižek, and Badiou.<sup>12</sup> Suffice it to mention here that the gracefulness of Ruda’s approach is that, while developing an argument similar to Žižek’s regarding a subject that precedes subjectivation (the Badiouian subject that arises through fidelity to the event), he does so not as an external Lacanian criticism of Badiou but from within Badiou’s own system, through a reflection on the specificity of philosophy and the task of philosophy. While Badiou

argues that philosophy has no proper field but is conditioned by events in the four generic procedures (art, science, love, and politics), Ruda makes the case for a specifically philosophical subject, a subject that precedes the event and prepares the way for its coming, via an anticipatory procedure of de-narcissization, a formal emptying out of the ego. The bitter pill of fatalism is meant to shake the (liberal free market) subject out of its complacency and indifference, to expose its supposed freedom as nothing but a mask for its incapacity to act. To use the Lacanian formula: the salutary effect of fatalism is to raise impotence to the level of impossibility.

In fact, it would be interesting to pursue further the dialogue with Lacan on the subject of fate, especially contained in his eighth seminar on *Transference*. Whereas Ruda, with his series of slogans, presents fatalism as an ethical imperative, Lacan makes it into modernity's repressed underside: fatalism is the truth of the *subject* in contradistinction to the *ego*, with its illusions of free choice, autonomy, and self-control. Lacan articulates an account of the vicissitudes of fate and subjectivity through a reading of Paul Claudel's *Coûfontaine Trilogy*, in which he develops a theory of the historical transformations of tragedy, from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Claudel. To cut a long story short: for Lacan, neurosis is the consequence of the modern "fatalism without fate," it is the predominant mode in which the demise of the God of destiny is subjectivized (when God is dead, Lacan famously claimed, nothing is permitted—a vicious superego takes the place of the absent God, the subject is imprisoned in a labyrinth of inhibitions and imperatives of its own making). We are sick, so the diagnosis goes, not because of the cruelty of destiny, but because this destiny has itself crumbled: it lacks substantial support, it is not guaranteed by any transcendent instance or master plan or overarching framework. Lacan's term for the worst is *Versagung*, a word which Freud's readers usually translate as "frustration," but which Lacan more literally interprets as a broken promise or refusal (*Ver-sagen*). For Lacan, the refusal expresses the subject's fraught relation to a deficient symbolic order, to an Other which—like in Ruda's version of the Hegelian Absolute—knows that it is lacking (though this "knowledge" can never be fully assumed but remains a gap or hole in the symbolic field). The subject is the bearer of a refusal it cannot face, and so it flees from this disaster into the ecstatic orderliness of neurosis. Neurosis is a figure of fate in the guise of its opposite: the great irony of obsessional neurotics is that they are partisans of free choice yet are unable to choose, living their lives in an eternal maybe; this vacillation and indecision is the ultimate truth of the freedom of choice. Lacan's response to this impasse is to radicalize the *Versagung*: what analysis can help to show is that neurosis is not simply a matter of accidental psychological damage or failed social adaptation, but there is a certain truth in the neurotic's hesitations and inner conflicts. They bear on the Other's lack, its broken promise, the gap which makes of the symbolic order more a symbolic disorder. At the same time, it is from the impossible place of refusal that something new can be born: the object of desire.

For all the talk of hopelessness and despair, it is remarkable that Ruda favors not tragedy but comedy. Comedy is the privileged access point for grasping what is at stake in fatalism, or, more precisely, the Hegelian-Freudian "fatalism without fate." Why

should this be the case? Though often considered a light or frivolous genre, it is comedy that goes furthest in exposing the void of subjectivity. For Ruda, following Alenka Zupančič's groundbreaking work on comedy, the key comic gesture consists in "continuing even after everything seems to have been relinquished, including the character himself" (168). If in tragedy the hero is destined to ruination and death, and often precipitates this terrible end precisely by trying to avoid it, in comedy the situation is even worse: one lingers on after the end, one somehow survives one's own death. The lesson is not the somber one that one cannot escape fate, but rather that this fate is itself nothing, and it is this peculiar nothingness that that can make us laugh. This was ingeniously captured in a story by the great avant-garde slapstick writer Daniil Kharms: "There was a redheaded man who had no eyes or ears. He didn't have hair either, so he was called a redhead arbitrarily. He couldn't talk because he had no mouth. He didn't have a nose either. He didn't even have arms or legs. He had no stomach, he had no back, no spine, and he didn't have any insides at all. There was nothing! So, we don't even know who we're talking about. We'd better not talk about him any more."<sup>13</sup> At the end of *Abolishing Freedom* Ruda presents a taxonomy of fatalism, in which he distinguishes four major types: tragic fatalism, which emphasizes the inevitability of conflict and endless struggle (think of Freud's grand mythology of the struggle between Eros and Thanatos); existential fatalism, in which one peels away the alienated layers of the self in order to discover the nothingness at one's core, which then can be appropriated as a fount of creativity and reinvention (this was famously preached at the Esalen Institute: at bottom you are nothing and therefore can be whoever you want); nihilistic fatalism which asserts the worthlessness of all things (Nietzsche's last men); and finally, comic fatalism, which results from stripping away the last substantial remnants of these. From tragedy, it subtracts the attachment to a human condition defined by strife; from existentialism, the void as the power of self-actualization; and from nihilism, its narcissistic pride in revealing the futility of things. What is left is a formal emptiness, a troublesome gap in being, like a redheaded man without hair who is not a man: for Ruda this is the in-existent subject of fatalism, partner-in-crime of a self-canceling God who admits that He has no plan and does not exist.

I will conclude with one last point. To a book that devotes itself to relentlessly thinking the worst, one might pose the question: what, then, is the best? Is it best simply to know the worst? ("Where everything is bad it must be good to know the worst," as the epitaph by F.H. Bradley goes in Adorno's *Minima Moralia*). I would put things slightly differently. If the worst has already happened, then it must be "best after the end" (borrowing a phrase from Lithuanian curator Raimundas Malašauskas). If the predominant reality is one in which the worst gets even worse, *Abolishing Freedom* ought to be read as a plea not for a "better world" but for a "better worst." A worst which is no longer an object of anxiety-ridden fascination, the stuff of hopes and dreams and nightmares, but serves as the lever for an act, a decision, an engagement, an intervention, the creation of something new: a fatal freedom as opposed to the freedom of the market. For a rationalist at least one thing is certain: there's no better starting point than the end.

<sup>1</sup> In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud writes: “If anyone were inclined to put forward the paradoxical proposition that the normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows, psycho-analysis, on whose findings the first half of the assertion rests, would have no objection to raise against the second half” (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, et al. [London: Hogarth, 1955], Vol. IX, 52).

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Economy and the Future: A Crisis of Faith*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 128.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 4. All further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Ruda, Interview with Alfie Bown in *Hong Kong Review of Books* (September 13, 2016), available at: <https://hkrbooks.com/2016/09/13/hkrb-interviews-frank-ruda/> (accessed August, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Oxana Timofeeva, “The End of the World: From Apocalypse to the End of History and Back,” *e-flux journal* no. 56 (June 2014); <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60337/the-end-of-the-world-from-apocalypse-to-the-end-of-history-and-back/> (accessed August, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Mladen Dolar, “Si fractus illabatur orbis,” lecture at Villanova University, April 2013 (unpublished).

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), 67.

<sup>8</sup> I give a more detailed reading of this in my *The Trouble With Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 39-42.

<sup>9</sup> It would be a highly worthwhile endeavor to confront Ruda’s fatalism with that of Gilles Deleuze. I am thinking not only of Deleuze’s Stoicism, as elaborated in *Logic of Sense*, but also his concepts of the spiritual automaton, involuntarism (all creative thought has a forced or compulsive character), and the exhaustion of the possible. Would not the “thought without image” be the Deleuzian version of what Ruda calls the worst? One could thus show a certain convergence (I did not say identity) between the arch anti-Hegelian Deleuze and one of the sharpest contemporary Hegelians today, Ruda.

<sup>10</sup> Is this not what happens in psychoanalysis? The point of the cardinal rule (“Say whatever comes into your mind, without concern for its meaning, coherence, or appropriateness”) is to sideline the expressive self in order to let language do the talking.

<sup>11</sup> Timofeeva, “The End of the World.”

<sup>12</sup> See Frank Ruda, *For Badiou: Idealism Without Idealism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), especially 127-132; Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 158-167, and *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 51-89.

<sup>13</sup> Daniil Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*, trans. Matvei Yankelevich (New York: Ardis, 2009), 45.