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What's Lack?—The Player's "Act Natural"
in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

The Player's inquiry of "act natural" might be: in what sense do we act? If it is valid to assert that act is expected by the very audience—it demands certain viewers qua the other—then is the subject's behavior, whether it is consistent or not, always inescapable from the gaze of the other? Why "act natural"? Is there a condition which makes the subject act "un-natural" or "inactive," trapped in the stagnancy of waiting, expecting, or even doing nothing at all? If we adopt the Lacanian notion that the subject's desire is the desire of the big Other, our act is the very act that coherently assumes the expectation of social norms and codes. Dostoevsky gives us a theological statement—"If there's no God, everything is permitted."—which means the Law thwarts the totally free act of humanity. However, Žižek inverts this motto in two ways: (1) "God is dead, we live in a permissive universe, you should strive for pleasure and happiness," (*Conversation* 105) but the enjoyment is permitted only in conditions of depriving its dangerous substance. (2) "If God is dead, superego enjoins you to enjoy, but every determinate enjoyment is already a betrayal of the unconditional one, so it should be prohibited" (106). In other words, we are unable to attain the real enjoyment when the efficiency of the Law is longer valid. The argument is that the subject is unable to act "natural" (as the gesture of enjoyment) in the condition of the effects of the big Other being diminished. This article tries to argue that the two gentlemen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are double conditioned by William Shakespeare's original play *Hamlet* and also by Tom Stoppard, and they are inevitably dead. However, rather than seeking the meaning of the life

in their destiny, accepting the doomed future and acting/working on it may be the way to break the preconditioned design. It, as the Player suggests: "...can crack the shell of mortality" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 61). The point is that they need to assume their death and act disregarding their destiny—to be free from the bondage of their historical context—and then they are capable of endowing meaning to their life.

In the era of our present, the symbolic efficiency, which might be loftily related to authority, law or the Name-of-the-Father, has been diminished. The decline reflects the weakening of the symbolic order, being held in a chain of significations, and it emphasizes the instability of signification and the absence of guaranteed meaning. The diminishment of the symbolic itself doesn't arouse the doubt of its own being but of its authenticity and creditability. What it renders is our inability to know what to trust or on whom we might rely. The crisis of symbolic investiture highlights the loss of a powerful authority. "Subjects respond to his loss by positing an all the more intrusive, invasive, and proximate power," Jodi Dean argues, "by failing to believe the fiction of the symbolic order and suppress the sense in which it covers over arbitrary power" (166). In other words, the subject concerns the certainty itself not less than reality. The loss of connection with the big Other has proliferated and thence makes the "[S]ubject unprotected by symbolic norms" (Dean 128) and threatened by imaginary figures¹. Dean elaborates not only the symptom of psychotics but also of psychotic writings, a discourse that reacts to a hole with "certainty, fear, distrust, and a permeating sense of meaning" (169). While the subjects seek the liberty from the traditional solidity of the symbolic, the decline of symbolic efficiency introduces new opportunities for guilt and anxiety. Why is "guilt" valid here? The consciousness of guilt is not only "of having given ground relative to one's desire" (*How to* 81), but also relates to a "recognized indebtedness toward being"² (Kristeva 17). "Guilty" and "responsible," in this sense, are put in the same

¹ Jodi Dean adopts Lacan's notion of the symbolic by asserting: "To compensate for the hole in the symbolic, the psychotic turns to the imaginary" (167).

² Julia Kristeva develops Heidegger's *Dasein*, "thrown into being," by asserting that human existences "guilty."

catalogue of meanings to human consciousness—subjectivity is required to be responsible to its existence.

The very awareness of being in the consciousness of the subject relates to its reference to personal identity: in holding someone responsible for some past action, he/she must be identical to the person who performed that action. Identity relation is “a relation uniquely unifying temporally distinct person-stages via consciousness” (“Personal”)—the subject must be aware of himself/herself acting by virtue of the awareness of the Other: “the big Other must be there” (Žižek, *How to* 6).

However, Slavoj Žižek elaborates the two photos of the same person: on the first, it is in his destitute homeless state, dirty with an unshaved face, and the second is a dressed up by a top designer. Beneath the different appearances, the idea of one and the same person is shaken: “It was not only the appearance that was different; the deeply disturbing effect of this change of appearances was that we, the spectators, somehow perceived a different personality beneath the appearances” (*Conversation* 87). The kernel of identity to him which accounts for our dignity is contingent on the very appearance, and “the core of our subjectivity is a void filled in by appearances” (87). If the human identity is contingent, and the subjectivity is void in its core, why the awareness of guilt reminds the subject of the indebtedness toward the existence of its subjectivity? Žižek explains that when humanity fights for salvation or for good against evil, the act not only strives for the very idea of humanity itself (or personal identity), “but, in a way, concerns the fate of the universe and the fate of God Himself” (*Conversation* 88). What has been entailed is about the very notion of “ethics,” which “is broadly construed to be about the way(s) in which we ought to live our lives, and so it includes both self-regarding and other-regarding practical concerns” (“Personal” 1). Above

She notes: “...it (the subjectivity) owes being to something that it is not itself; it is indebted vis-à-vis being by virtue of its very existence. Consciousness is in primordial debt, which the activity of thought reveals but which is expressed as *schuldig* (this German word means ‘guilty’ or ‘responsible’ for an act as well as ‘indebted’ toward someone). From now on, ‘to think’ will be identified with ‘to thank’ precisely by virtue of this recognized indebtedness toward being” (17).

all, the problem that we deal with is about how we situate ourselves under the condition of symbolic diminishment, whose void in its very core is perceived³, since the big Other “operates at a symbolic level” (How to 9). Doesn’t this issue of human struggle correspond to Heidegger’s *schuldig* (elaborated by Julia Kristeva) that the subject is “indebted” to its own existence and, at the same time, it must be “responsible” for its own course? What the existentialist fights for is not only for proving his/her existence but also for the ontological position in the eye of the big Other. Instead of asking: “Who am I, and what am I in the eye of the Other,” the existentialist bets his position on act. The two protagonists in Tom Stoppard’s play share the doubt about their destiny; however, instead of acting and striving to prove their suspicions, they eliminate them by reason. One might say that their fate is determined by the pre-existence of design—“predestination”—according to which human destination is dependent solely on God’s will: “what the causal connection is between human’s willing and acting and their salvation or damnation, and predestination or reprobation” (“Predestination”).

The concept of “predestination” qua the view of the two protagonists is a dark vision, inherited from the prince Hamlet who “struggles through social disorder, psychological crisis, and metaphysical confusion to an affirmation of an order operating through all things” (Egan, “Thin Bean” 60). By asserting that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are “caught up in the action of Hamlet” (61), Robert Egan’s argument shares some Foucaultian similarities. To Egan, there seems to be an obscure power or an invisible hand manipulating and confining the destiny of Hamlet as well as the two characters: there must be “something behind” the appearance. The “something behind” is Foucault’s power relation.

In Foucault’s elaboration, Bentham’s architectural figure of Panopticon is a

³ The big Other offers the subject to “act as if it exists.” Žižek elucidates: “...it is the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it, the ground of their whole existence, the point of reference that provides the ultimate horizon of meaning, something for which these individuals are ready to give their lives...yet the only thing that really exists are these individuals believe in it and act accordingly” (How to 10).

composition of visible and invisible power (“Panopticon” 195-228). The inhabitants in the Panopticon are subjected to a field of visibility by an invisible observer—this power has already passed from the surface of physical power into an innate one. “[I]t (the external power) tends to the non-corporal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any confrontation and which is always decided in advance” (202). What Egan’s characters being “caught up in the action” is no less than Foucault’s power constraining the subject which is “decided in advance.” Foucault’s power exercise has transformed from the perceivable to the natural-invisible: “The body, required to be docile in its minutest operations, opposes and shows the conditions of functions proper to an organism. Disciplinary power has as its correlative an individuality that is not only analytical and ‘cellular’, but also natural and ‘organic’” (156). In other words, the socialized body is very coherently regulated by power. But whether the big plot of *Hamlet*, in which the two minor characters are held up, or the power relations, which dominate the subject’s convictions and behaviors, the predominant condition reveals the very ineradicable relation of the big Other and the subjects. To Lacan, the big Other structures the subject’s recognition and also regulates the interaction of subjects (*How to*, 41). What plight Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are entrapped in is that they are conditioned by the big Other, which first presents itself as solid and powerful but later turns obscure and doubtful.

In the beginning, the two characters have been tossing coins and waiting. Guildenstern feels a frustrated suspense of each coin with a “head” upside. Suspiciously, he asks Rosencrantz: “No questions? Not even a pause?” “Not a flicker of doubt?” (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 11) Rosencrantz answers that he would have a good look at the coin for a start when every toss comes out with tails. Guildenstern is convinced by the law of probability. He elucidates: “The scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of fear” (13). He employs his “reason” to explain the unusual consequence:

“The equanimity of your average tosser of coins depends upon the law, or rather a tendency, or let us say a probability... It related the fortuitous and the ordained into a reassuring union which we recognized as nature” (14). In his conviction, it is normal and natural that each time the coin turns with a head upside after tossing. By accepting the outcome of possibility of each time with a head upside, the contingent chance is no more than “truth” in this condition.

Guildenstern’s thought requires pure reason so much so that it excludes very personal emotion and fantasy. In his “unicorn story,” the event of witnessing a unicorn eventually becomes a fantasy or a dream: “A horse with an arrow in its forehead! It must have been mistaken for a deer” (17). The pure reason, shared by Guildenstern, in Žižek’s reading of the Cartesian *cogito*, is the result of the forced choice between thought and being. He expounds: “the access to thought (‘I think’) is paid for by the loss of being,” and “the access to being (‘I am’) is paid for by the relegation of thought to the Unconscious” (*Tarrying* 59). Thus, the *cogito* qua the thought must relinquish the being in reality. But where is I’s own being that we might ask? Lacan rephrases Descartes’s dictum as: “*I doubt, therefore I am*—the absolute certainty provide by the fact that my most radical doubt implies my existence qua thinking subject—with another turn of the screw, reversing its logic: *I am only insofar as I doubt*” (author’s italic; 69). It seems to say: the symptom of neurosis, originated from the very emotion, oscillating between prohibition and transgression, provides the subject’s own being—“this uncertainty provides his minimal ontological consistency” (70). Thus, when Guildenstern attempts to eradicate his own doubt with the pure reason qua thought, his being is merely structured by fantasy.⁴ Rosencrantz has the same attitude and succumbs to the order from the king by telling Guildenstern: “We were sent for.” “That’s why we’re here” (*Rosencrantz* 15). It implies that they are been told, and they have no doubt—we are called by our very truth of destiny, so we cannot doubt.

⁴ “The ‘masculine’ cogito chooses being, the ‘I am,’ yet what it gets is being which is merely thought, not real being (cogito ‘ergo sum,’ I think ‘therefore I am,’ as Lacan writes it), i.e., it gets the fantasy-being, the being of a ‘person,’ the being in ‘reality’ whose frame is structured by fantasy” (Žižek, *Tarrying* 61).

With the approach of the band, they meet the tragedians on the road, and the Player tells them both: “I recognized you at once...as fellow artists” (18). Instead of recognizing them as gentlemen, the Player suggests that the personal identity is a sort of “exhibition” by the one who performs: act and position are two sides of the same coin. The human identity and behavior are confined and encoded by his cultural and social condition, and performance confirms his position. The Player seems to penetrate the “secret” of their destiny: he knows human identity as well as his fate is formed by both the cultural condition and the very performance that, it is, the very appearance. In some sense, this sort of appearance fills in very void of the core of the subject. It also elucidates that human subjectivity is formed contingently by its cultural and social bond.

Both Guildenstern and Rosencrantz wait for an omen from the play of the tragedians, but this expected predicament turns out to be degraded. Guildenstern complains: “No enigma, no dignity, nothing classical, only this—a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes...” (*Rosencrantz* 21). Doesn’t Guildenstern’s complaint successfully correspond to the Real they are? The royal gentlemen, sent from the command of the king, are supposed to be doing the great errand, but, on the contrary, they are merely a tool to the king, being used as spies for Hamlet. It corresponds to Žižek’s notion on the very contingency of the big Other—what happens to them usually escapes their expectations. The Player, however, sees the situation of the two gentlemen and says: “We keep to our usual stuff, more or less, only inside out. We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else” (22). The Player has suggested that the dead end of significance qua symbolic deadlock will eventually shift into a new field of meanings. However, in what sense that doubt qua “my being” relates to a symbolic deadlock here?

Žižek’s notion on doubt qua existence or being, in my reading, can be related to Julia Kristeva’s sense of *revolt*. The word revolt, which comes from Italian words, maintains the Latin meaning of “to return” and “to exchange,” which implies “a diversion at the outset that

will soon be assimilated to a rejection of authority” (*The Sense* 2). Why do we need “to revolt” today? The great moments of 20th century art and culture, to her, present themselves in a form of revolt. She also indicates the impasses of the cultural phenomenon in our times: “the failure of rebellious ideologies, on the one hand, and the surge of consumer culture, on the other” (7). The very questions she entails: why should we rebel (or revolt); why should we respond to our past experience or tradition; why can’t we just be content with the entertainment culture in the capitalist commodities? “We shouldn’t!” (7) because happiness exists only at the price of a revolt. “None of us has pleasure without confronting an obstacle, prohibition, authority, or law that allows us to realize ourselves as autonomous and free” (7). The thinkers, such as Marx, Freud and Zola, and the artists, such as Picasso, are the “revolts” who proffer various modalities of time and lead us not to imagine the end of history “but to try to bring new figures of temporality to the fore” (9). In this sense, revolt implies the rebellion against the predestined condition and proffering a new meaning to the present and even to the future.

The impasse that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern encounter is the incapability of revolt. Their doubt, qua the very existence of the subject and the very initiation of the premature revolt, starts to suspend the big Other’s intention. Tom Stoppard intends to give us an ambivalent meaning of this condition: either the two gentlemen are trapped in the conditioned text of *Hamlet*, or in their acknowledgement, the plot of the whole situation is a design, an intrigue. Soon after king Claudius asks them to watch prince Hamlet, Guildenstern tells his partner: “It’s a game” (*Rosencrantz* 31). They have already known that the plot isn’t necessary truth. However, the only thing they do is just a “revolt” on lips. The slim hope for expecting some change strongly depends on an anonymous someone: “The only thing that makes it bearable is the irrational belief that somebody interesting will come on in a minute” (31). This expectation in some sense reflects their boredom and doubt to their condition, but they actually do nothing all at—or their attitude, we might assert, is no more than the notion

of “interpassivity.”⁵ Doesn’t this “somebody interesting” stand for the event that is capable of bringing some change for them, so that they could satisfy themselves simply by enjoying the game? Their uneasiness is dissolved by their word-game:

Guil: Are you deaf?

Ros: Am I dead?

Guil: Yes or no?

Ros: Is there a choice?

Guil: Is there a God? (33)

Their suspicions in the series of questions, which imply their doubt and dilemma, unfortunately fall into “interpassivity”: what the virtual reality satisfies (or dupes) me is that it escapes the direct confrontation with the chaos and brutality of reality. Their attitude fits in the problem that Žižek comments on the modern intellectual: “One can authentically suffer through reports on rapes and mass killings in Bosnia, while calmly pursuing one’s academic career” (“Interpassive”). And isn’t Guildenstern’s self-interrogation— “Why should it matter?” “It doesn’t matter.” (*Rosencrantz* 33)—a sufficient implication of “interpassivity”? Since our “someone interesting” is not us, it doesn’t matter whether we play in games or in reality. Thus, the more indulgence in managing linguistic skills, the more satisfaction is proffered, and what their thought presents to us is: “Let the big Other do our job.”

GUIL: Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace, to which we are...condemned. Each move is dictated by the previous one—that is the meaning of order. If we start being arbitrary it’ll just be a shambles: at least, let us hope so. Because if we happened, just happened to discover,

⁵ With the new electronic media, “I no longer stare at the screen, I increasingly interact with it, entering into a dialogic relationship with it.” But there is a problem entailed: the viewers “participate actively not only in the spectacle, but more and more in establishing the very rules of the spectacle...” The object actually enjoys the interaction instead of the viewer. The machine will record the programs I missed though “I do not actually watch films, the very awareness that the films I love are indulge in exquisite are of far niente—as if the VCR is in a way watching them for me, in my place... VCR stands here for the ‘big Other,’ for the medium of symbolic registration (Žižek “Interpassive”).

or even suspect, that our spontaneity was part of their order, we'd know that we were lost. (43-44)

Guilkenstern's statement sufficiently reveals the demand from the big Other as if he is a wheel in part of the mechanic unity, called the universe. But can we have our enjoyment since the big Other takes over or deprives our decision? When the Law has been inserting its validity, it functions to protect and keep the subject from the injunction of the chaotic Real, and, at the same time, it deprives us of the every excess of our enjoyment. Thus, Guilkenstern has perceived their dilemma—taking off the symbolic order (“if we start being arbitrary”), the chaotic Real will come to interfere (“it'll be just a shambles”). Thus, the new opportunity of guilt and anxiety, as the excess, would come to join our process of pursuing enjoyment.

Julia Kristeva offers us that real happiness can happen on the “revolt” of the subject because the prohibitions qua the big Other as a supplement of our enjoyment: the prohibitive boundary would provide the very fantasy of enjoyment for the transgressors. Slavoj Žižek, however, tells us that enjoyment is something that cannot be done through the Other (“Interpassive”). Both suggest that the authentic happiness should be gained when the subject takes its own course, the responsibility, and starts to deal with its “guilty” conscience, a sense indebted to its own being.

In Stoppard's play, the two gentlemen have already known the whole plan of their situation. (In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, they are ignorant to the whole plot.) While waiting for the king's order, they practice a rehearsal in which Guilkenstern enacts prince Hamlet.

ROS: To sum up: your father, whom you love, dies, you are his heir, you come back to find that hardly was the corpse cold before his young brother popped on to his throne and into his sheets, thereby offending both legal and natural practice. Now why exactly are you behaving in this extraordinary manner?

GUIL: I can't imagine! (*Pause.*) But all that is well known, common property. Yet he sent for us. And we did come. (*Rosencrantz* 38)

They know the whole plot is an intrigue “offending both legal and natural practice” (38), but, instead of getting involved in their condition, they choose to deny and detach from it.

In Act II, the Player gives them the very answer to their doubt: “Relax. Respond. That’s what people do. You can’t go through life questioning your situation at every turn” (48). Also, answering to Guildenstern’s anxiety—“We don’t know how to *act*” (author’s italic, 49)—the Player puts it: “Act natural.” For the Player, nothing is to be true, so “everything has to be taken on trust; truth is only that which is taken to be true” (49). Doesn’t this dialogue reveal the Player a real atheist, regardless of the existence of the big Other (may present as God) through the acting? He doesn’t ask the meaning of the situation at every turn because the big Other is contingent. (To be more radical, the real atheist doesn’t deny or work against God because it is no longer a question.)⁶ The attribution of contingency, for Žižek, also means the integral void in the core of the big Other because “the Symbolic is a differential network structured around an empty, traumatic place” (*Interrogating* 45). This traumatic place means the ever turn of life, the symbolic deadlock. Thus, the Player tells them that the way to die depends on one’s talent. Even the general talent, which extracts significance from melodrama, can “crack the shell of mortality” (*Rosencrantz* 61). Doesn’t this act to “crack the shell of mortality” mean to break the preconditioned destiny of the subject?

Jonathan Bennett argues that the two gentlemen have been haunted by the fear of living and being dead unreal. However, the substance of being “real” includes the “capacities for initiation action” (“Philosophy” 10). Bennet also suggests that they have already known that they need to do something which is “not prescribed by someone else” (12). However, their condition is determined in two ways: either the king calls them to run the errand and die, or their existence is designed as “stage-machinery for Shakespeare’s play” (12). Therefore, Tom

⁶ As Žižek puts it, “‘Atheism’ (in the sense of deciding not to believe in God) is a miserable, pathetic stance of those who long for God but cannot find him (or who ‘rebel against God’). A true atheist does not choose atheism: for him, the question itself is irrelevant—this is the stance of a truly atheistic subject” (*Interrogating* 15).

Stoppard's play has decided their death, as the title elucidates. It is as well as the Player tells them: "We're tragedians, you see. We follow directions—there is no choice involved" (*Rosencrantz* 59). The condition of the tragedians is to come to death in the end. Doesn't this situation, however, correspond to the protagonists who are designed to be killed? Certain, they don't have choice either, because the author has determined their fate, and the spectators have expected their acting and limitations. Isn't the preconditioned death also a desire of fantasy, since death is a gaze of the impossible—the impossible of imagining the world without me? Or, if we go further, does the Player's crack-the-shell-of-mortality also suggest a formation of fantasy of the individual? The inquiry is obvious for Žižek: "What we encounter in the very core of the fantasy formation is the relationship to the desire of the Other: to the opacity of the Other's desire" (*Interrogating* 58). On the symbolic level of Lacan's notion—"desire is the desire of the Other," the determination of the subject's desire involves the dialectic of recognition: "what I desire is determined by the symbolic network within which I articulate my subjective position, and so on" (59). In other words, the very desire of the subject is constructed by its social structure and conditions and so on. In this sense, the death to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a domain of enclosed emptiness, no room for fantasy and significance. Therefore, they refuse to accept death since everything to them isn't truth and being unreal. "Life in a box is better than no life at all," says Rosencrantz (52), who is incapable of imaging a life with risks. He prefers life in a limitation, without revolt and transgression. Helene Keyssar-Franke tells us that in Acts I and II, they believe there is chance to escape death, but in Act III, they realize they're limited or entrapped. Instead of escaping the plot of the design, "they are being manipulated inexorable toward death" (95) after they read the letter of the king. Her argument corresponds to Lacan's notion—the desire of death is lurking under the surface of our anxiety because our text has already determined our death. However, they are still unable to symbolize their destiny: "Death is the ultimate negative. Not-being," Guildenstern asserts (*Rosencrantz* 79). What the two protagonists

encounter is the difficulty in imaging or symbolizing the meaning of their occasions, even in symbolizing the outcome of their own death. It is as Keyssar-Franke argues: “Guildestern is not absorbed by the game for more than a moment because he is repeatedly thrown into meditation of distress by the content of a question and because he is constantly aware of the difficulties in the meaning and intention of the game itself” (93).

When the Player plays death “tragically” and “romantically” (91), Guildestern resists the idea that his act can bring any symbolic change: “No ... no ... not for us, not like that. Dying is not romantic, and death is not a game which will soon be over ... Death is not anything ... It’s the absence of presence, nothing more” (91-92). Robert Egan argues that “death brings out the poetry in him,” and the Player has taken faith than reason on the turn of life—“everything, as the Player himself has said, has to be taken on trust—whereas Guildestern’s despair is born of an uncompromising empiricism” (69). The turn of life indicates the very inconsistency in the chain of symbolic, or it is a void in the core of every situation—i.e. a trauma. If the very turn of life represents the traumatic void, or the failure of symbolization, then doesn’t this act-upon-death also signify the symbolic act, which attempts to proffer the meaning and place it in this emptiness?

Let’s return to the Player’s “act natural.” What does act mean in his suggestion? It is a symbolic one: “strive to act, even if prematurely, in order to arrive at the correct act through this very error. One must be duped in one’s desire, though it is ultimately impossible, in order that something real comes about” (*Interrogating* 41). This symbolic act has no guarantee of success because what we perceive is usually “the empty gesture”⁷ of our fantasy, structured by the very desire. Rosencrantz and Guildestern treat the Player’s act-upon-death as an empty gesture, a choice of impossibility. However, some acts necessarily take the empty gesture, the offering of choice presumed to be rejected. It is what Žižek defines as Lacan’s

⁷ In Žižek’s explanation, the empty gesture offers “the opportunity to choose the impossible, that which inevitable will not happen” (*Plague* 27).

“traversing the fantasy”: “to treat the forced choice as a true choice” (*Plague* 29). It involves “the acceptance of the traumatic fact of radical closure: there is no opening, is as such is necessary” (30). By means of the empty gesture, the very bond of the big Other, “which structures our belonging to a community, is over. . . . Once we move beyond desire—that is to say, beyond the fantasy which sustains desire—we enter the strange domain of *drive*: the domain of the closed circular palpitation which finds satisfaction in endlessly failed gesture” (30). In this sense, when the two gentlemen take the choice of the impossible—i.e. act upon death—they are able to be free from the plan of the big Other.

To take the forced choice as a true choice, for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, is to assume that they will inevitably be dead, and only to accept their doomed future, they can start to work on it. On the condition of accepting the catastrophe of our future, Žižek argues, “we should mobilize ourselves to perform the act that will change destiny itself and thereby insert a new possibility in to the past” (*Paul’s* 195). Guildenstern asks: “And why us?—anybody would have done. And we have contributed nothing” (*Rosencrantz* 68). Also, Rosencrantz inquires: “Who’d have thought that we were so important?” The Player answers: “You are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That’s enough” (90). Doesn’t the Player’s answer correspond to Žižek’s “we are the ones we have been waiting for”? “Waiting for another to do the job for us is a way of rationalizing our inactivity” (*Paul’s* 196). Žižek actually elucidates the situation of us in the 21st century. In his argument, there is no big Other to rely on. Even the big Other is hostile to us: “inner thrust of our historical development leads to catastrophe, to apocalypse, so that what can prevent catastrophe is pure voluntarism, that is, our free decision to act against the historical necessity” (196). Rosencrantz says in anguish: “All I ask is a change of ground” (*Rosencrantz* 69). His inquiry is a symbolic change that can prevent their catastrophe in the future. However, when they are waiting and inquiring the change of the symbolic, they ignore that they are the ones who can really do something to change that it is as the Player suggests: you know who you are, and that’s good enough.

“Authentic belief,” to Žižek, “is to be opposed to the reliance on a subject supposed to believe” (*Paul’s* 199) that it is—the subject needs no big Other to support its belief. And the Player’s “act natural” represents the very belief which frees one from the watch of the big Other that it is as Žižek tells us: “[authentic belief] presupposes the destitution of the big Other, the full acceptance of the inexistence of the big Other” (199). In other words, “act natural” means to act for its own sake, disregarding the big Other’s expectation, which may appear as rational logics or probabilities. The symbolic act is the radical one that takes the empty gesture of the impossible, and it “succeeds in its very failure” (*Interrogating* 44). Because it takes the choice of the impossible, it sometimes causes an event in the history of the symbolic:

Initially, the event is experienced as a contingent trauma, as an eruption of the non-symbolized; it is only by passing through repetition that it is ‘recognized’, which can only signify here: realized in the symbolic order. And this recognition-by-passing-through-repetition necessarily presupposes (much like Moses in Freud’s analysis) a crime, an act of murder...” (43)

It is true that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not Moses, but through act-upon-death, they may at least proffer some meanings for their being. The Player tells them: “They can die heroically, comically, ironically, slowly, ...or from a great height. ...from out of this matter, there escapes a chin bean of light that, seen at the right angle, can crack the shell of mortality” (*Rosencrantz* 61). What the Player tries to convey is to learn how to accept death rather than how to escape it. To crack the shell of mortality is a symbolic act which erodes the historical necessity and open up a new space for the future. Through act, our conscious “to-own” *Dasein* might become “to-proffer” it the possible meanings on the field of the symbolic which means “to crack the shell of mortality.”

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