
RESEARCH ARTICLE

***The Aleph* and the Real: An Examination of Borges' Short Story through Slavoj Zizek's Psychoanalytic Theory**

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the concept of the Real, as proposed by Slavoj Zizek, through the study of *The Aleph* by Jorge Luis Borges. This short story best represents this idea of the Real as intended by the Slovenian philosopher. Yet, Borges displays the idea of the Real through a mystical perspective, whereas Zizek tends to lean on psychoanalytical perspectives. Once the short story is read through Zizek, we can perceive a new interpretation of the text. Otherwise, the transformative process after encountering the Aleph remains ambiguous and irrelevant. A similar idea of this transformation is also represented in many religious readings of the concept of God. This paper tends to study this idea of the Real through the psychoanalytic theory of Slavoj Zizek. His theory makes a long journey through Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. The objective of this study is to have a new understanding of the ideas that undergo ambiguities and misunderstanding, including the idea of unseen powers that dominate our life.

KEYWORDS

Slavoj Zizek, the Real, psychoanalysis, Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph," transformation, loss.

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1. Introduction

Slavoj Zizek contributed greatly to the fields of psychoanalysis, cinema theory, and cultural studies. His works are based greatly on a number of concepts, including the connection between ideology, power, and subjectivity (Bosteels, 2017).

Zizek describes the Real, one of his central ideas, as that which exists outside of symbolism and meaning-making (Zizek, 2006). The symbolic order of language and society suppresses and represses the Real, a force that is always present (Badiou & Zizek, 2013). According to Zizek, the Real is an active force that disturbs and destabilizes the symbolic order rather than merely a lack or absence (Mullarkey, 2013). In times of crisis and suffering, the Real is felt, exposing the inadequacies of our symbolic systems (Zizek, 2014).

Politics, psychology, and aesthetics are significantly impacted by Zizek's concept of the Real (Dean, 2016). The Real in politics stands for the underlying tensions and conflicts that are suppressed by prevailing ideological narratives (Zizek, 2005). The painful experience that resists being assimilated into the ego's symbolic structure is known as the Real in psychology (Zizek, 2000). The Real in aesthetics is that which subverts norms and expectations and produces novel and surprising ways of constructing meaning (Zizek, 2004).

Jorge Luis Borges originally published his short tale "The Aleph" in 1945. The story centres around a mystical point in space that unites all other points in the cosmos and is told by Borges himself in the role of the main character. It is claimed that viewers can simultaneously perceive the entire cosmos from all vantage points and angles at the Aleph point.

The main character visits the Aleph, which is kept in the cellar of a structure owned by Carlos Argentino Daneri and who asserts to have discovered it. When the protagonist enters the Aleph, he is captivated by its amazing beauty and power despite being first skeptical. His sense of surprise and amazement changes his vision of reality as he experiences the past, present, and future of the entire cosmos all at once.

The short story serves as a meditation on reality itself and the boundaries of human perception. It calls into question how time and space relate to one another as well as the place of the individual in the greater scheme of things. The narrative implies that the world is ultimately incomprehensible and beyond human knowledge because the Aleph is a metaphor for the infinite.

2. The Structure of The Real in *The Aleph*

The underlying elements of Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The Aleph" can be understood by using Slavoj Žižek's concept of the Real, according to the paper's thesis. The framework for understanding the themes of infinity, the limitations of language and representation, and the relationship between reality and perception in "The Aleph" is provided by the Real, which is a traumatizing kernel of reality that cannot be fully symbolized or integrated into the symbolic order. The paper will make the case that Žižek's theory of the Real can deepen our comprehension of the narrative and offer fresh perspectives on its significance.

Understanding Slavoj Žižek's philosophy and approach to psychoanalysis, political theory, and cultural criticism requires an understanding of his conception of the Real, which is a key element of his philosophical framework. According to Žižek, "The Real designates the traumatic kernel of reality which resists symbolization" (Žižek, 1989, p. 39). His understanding of the Real is derived from the writings of French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, whose ideas have had a profound influence on Žižek's philosophy. As Žižek explains, "The Real is one of the key concepts in Lacan's work... It is an impossible, traumatic kernel of reality that resists full symbolization or representation within the symbolic order of language and culture" (Žižek, 2000, p. 24).

According to Žižek, the Real is that which we are unable to fully incorporate into our current symbolic frameworks and which defies our efforts to comprehend or exert control over. According to Žižek, "The Real is not an object or entity that can be directly perceived or experienced, but rather a void or gap in our symbolic reality that disrupts our attempts to make sense of the world" (Žižek, 1989, p. 39). Žižek offers the example of a traumatic experience to clarify the idea of the Real, explaining that "When a traumatic event occurs... it shatters our sense of reality and disrupts our symbolic frameworks. The traumatic experience is too overwhelming to be fully processed or integrated into our existing symbolic reality, and thus it remains outside of our conscious awareness, lurking in the shadows of our unconscious" (Žižek, 2000, p. 24).

Žižek also highlights the connection between the idea of the sublime and the Real, which he describes as "an experience of encountering something that is too vast or powerful to be fully comprehended" (Žižek, 2000, p. 24). As both involve encounters with things that cannot be entirely symbolized or absorbed into our preexisting frameworks of thinking, the sublime and the Real, in Žižek's view, are intimately related.

The Real is frequently used in political theory to illustrate the limitations of our efforts to create a fully rational and open social order. In spite of our best efforts to fully comprehend or govern society, Žižek contends that there is always a residue of the Real (Žižek, 1993, p. 23). This leftover material may manifest as ideological inconsistencies, social taboos, or other kinds of opposition to our efforts to impose a totally rational order on society.

Žižek contends that psychoanalytic philosophy has been significantly influenced by the idea of the Real. In his book "The Ticklish Subject", Žižek describes the Real as "the traumatic kernel of our being that resists symbolization and representation" (Žižek, 1999, p. 29). This traumatic kernel is linked to experiences that are hard to understand or symbolize and which are frequently suppressed or denied in order to preserve our symbolic world.

The Real is seen as a fundamental component of the therapeutic process in psychoanalytic therapy. As noted by Yael Goldman Baldwin in her article "The Real of Psychoanalysis: A Conversation with Slavoj Žižek", "the analyst's task is to help the patient confront and integrate the Real through the creation of a symbolic space" (Baldwin, 2015, p. 114). This entails developing a narrative that provides the patient's experiences context and helps them express their thoughts and feelings. The patient is able to alter their relationship with the traumatic Real and incorporate it into their symbolic reality through this process.

The Real can also be a catalyst for innovation and change, proving that it is not just a negative force in psychoanalysis. The urges and desires that haven't entirely integrated into our symbolic system are known as the Real in the Lacanian paradigm. As Žižek notes, "the Real is the source of creativity" (Žižek, 1999, p. 43). We can unleash our creative potential and broaden our symbolic reality by engaging with the Real.

Lacan claims that the Real is an elusive idea that exists outside of the symbolic world. We employ the symbolic, a language and set of signifiers, to communicate and comprehend the world around us. Our identities and interactions with others are shaped by a common set of cultural norms and values. The Real, on the other hand, is that which we are unable to fully comprehend or

express. As Lacan explains, "the Real is that which always lies outside language and which always disturbs and disrupts our sense of identity" (Ruti, 2016).

Traumatic events that defy our attempts to make sense of them within the symbolic order are frequently linked to the Real. We feel disoriented and confused as we attempt to incorporate these experiences into our comprehension of the universe. This is thus because the Real cannot fully be represented by the symbolic because it differs fundamentally from it. "The Real is an excess that resists symbolization and representation, and that can only be approached indirectly through the gaps and fissures in the symbolic order," write van Haute and Geyskens (2017).

The Real, despite being illusive, is a crucial element of the symbolic order. As Žižek explains, "the Real is not simply an external force that disrupts the symbolic order, but also an internal void that gives rise to desire and drives our search for meaning and fulfillment" (Žižek, 2012). In this way, the Real serves as a catalyst for both disruption and transformation since it forces us to reconsider our presumptions and look for fresh perspectives.

The Real's significance of comprehending traumatic experiences and psychological diseases is emphasized by psychoanalytic thought. "Trauma is an experience that shatters our sense of reality and leaves us with a sense of the 'unbearable Real,'" write Gabbard and Westen (2014). In order to move toward healing, psychoanalysis aims to assist patients in facing and accepting these experiences, incorporating them into their symbolic framework.

Grasp subjective experience requires an understanding of the idea of the Real, which stands for the underlying reality that is hidden by the symbolic order. The Real, according to Žižek, is whatever defies symbolism and representation (Žižek, 2006, p. 3). The Real is that which cannot be included in the symbolic system and hence persists as a traumatic kernel outside of it. This is especially important when talking about the subjective experience because the Real is what disturbs our perception of reality and makes us feel anxious or confused. As stated by Deamer and Cummins (2014), the Real is "the gap between our expectations and the actual experience that we encounter" (p. 48).

Traumatic experiences are frequently linked to the Real because they sabotage our perception of reality and make us face the boundaries of our symbolic order. This is also supported by Lacan's theories, according to which "trauma...is not simply a painful memory, but a fundamentally incomprehensible experience that shatters our sense of reality" (Lacan, 1966/1977, p. 40).

The importance of the Real for comprehending subjective experience lies in its ability to make us aware of the ways in which symbolic systems are used to create our perceptions of reality. "By recognizing the ways in which the symbolic order obscures the Real, we can begin to identify the gaps and fissures in our own sense of reality," said Stavrakakis in 2007. (p. 4). This knowledge can assist us in better understanding how we create meaning and in recognizing the boundaries of our own comprehension.

The Real also stands for the possibility of transformation and change. We can start to remove the obstacles that restrict our comprehension and widen our horizons by facing the Real. "The Real is...the very locus of transformation," according to Fink (1995). (p. 102). We are able to transcend the restrictions of the symbolic order and enjoy the full complexity of subjective experience thanks to this transforming experience.

The Aleph, a metaphor for the Real, which comprises all that cannot fully be expressed or understood, appears in Borges' "The Aleph," a work of fiction. Borges' description of the Aleph is consistent with Žižek's idea of the Real as something beyond human comprehension. As Borges puts it, "My eyes saw in the Aleph all things and all other things in the universe; I saw the Aleph from every point and angle, and in the Aleph I saw the earth, and in the earth the Aleph, and in the Aleph the earth." This difficulty in properly understanding the Aleph is a reflection of the idea that there is something real that defies symbolism.

Additionally, the Real's role in including experiences that cannot be fully incorporated into the symbolic order is mirrored by the Aleph's ability to include all experiences, including contradicting ones. "The teeming sea," "daybreak and nightfall," "the multitudes of America," "a silvery cobweb in the center of a black pyramid," "a splintered labyrinth (it was London)," "close up, unending eyes watching themselves in me as in a mirror," and "all the mirrors on earth and none of them reflected me" are some of the things that are said to be in Borges' Aleph. This capacity to hold opposing sensations is comparable to Žižek's idea of the Real, which he describes as undermining both the symbolic order and our capacity to make sense of the world.

The protagonist's contact with the Aleph in Jorge Luis Borges' narrative "The Aleph" is portrayed as an experience with the Real. A little iridescent orb called the Aleph is described as holding the entire cosmos, all locations in space and time, and the fullness of human experience. The main character initially questions its reality, but after seeing it, he is overcome by the experience and the knowledge it provides. He realizes how narrow his own understanding of the universe is in comparison to the vast array of viewpoints and experiences that exist at once.

The Aleph can be viewed as a manifestation of the Real in accordance with Lacanian theory, which holds that the Real is something that cannot be entirely symbolized or represented. As Lacan explains, "the Real...is that which resists symbolization absolutely" (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II). As with the Lacanian idea of the Real, the Aleph is beyond words and cannot be fully realized or understood. As is typical of contacts with the Real in psychoanalysis, the protagonist's meeting with the Aleph is also traumatic. One's perception of reality and their position within it may be challenged by one's experience with the Real, which can be overpowering and upsetting.

The infinite variety and richness of subjective experience are represented by the Aleph, which can also be thought of as a metaphor for the Real. The protagonist's contact with the Aleph is a moment of pure subjectivity, allowing him to view the cosmos and the human condition from his particular point of view. The Aleph stands for the countless points of view that are present at once and cannot all be fully understood or represented by one person. As Borges writes, "I saw the Aleph from every point and angle...seen from every angle, it was always infinite" (The Aleph).

Additionally, the Aleph can be interpreted as a criticism of the restrictions of the symbolic order. As a writer, the protagonist is first dubious about the Aleph's existence since he thinks that language and writing are the only forms of representation. But his interaction with the Aleph highlights how inadequate language and the symbolic order are for expressing the intricacy of subjective experience. Language is merely one method of addressing the Real, according to Lacan (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II). As a result, the Aleph poses a threat to the hierarchy of symbols and the constraints imposed by language as a medium of representation.

As Borges suggests in "The Aleph," coming into contact with the Real can have both unsettling and transformational consequences on a person. As stated by Žižek, "Encountering the Real is always traumatic, in the sense that it tears us out of the comforting familiarity of our symbolic universe and confronts us with the abyss of the Real" (Žižek, 2012). This disruptive effect of the Real on the psyche can be seen in the protagonist's unsettling experience of "vertigo and nausea" after peering into the Aleph. The contact with the Real can, however, also be transforming, opening up new avenues for subjective experience and expanding consciousness. The Real is always a radical Otherness that can never be totally integrated into the symbolic order, but it is also a source of innovation and regeneration, as emphasized by Kristeva (Kristeva, 1982). The Aleph's revelation of a "universe without end" and a "secret and ineffable god" is an example of this transformative potential. As evidenced by the protagonist's sentiments of detachment and humiliation in "The Aleph," coming into contact with the Real can also result in a feeling of alienation from the symbolic order. The Real is always something that resists symbolization; hence it can never entirely integrate into our symbolic universe, as Lacan emphasizes (Lacan, 1978). This feeling of exclusion and dislocation might be considered as an essential step on the way to a fresh perspective on the world.

The idea of loss is a central theme in "The Aleph" because the protagonist's encounter with the Aleph leaves him feeling incredibly lost and unstable. The Aleph was approximately two or three centimeters in diameter, but there was no reduction in size inside of it, according to Jorge Luis Borges, who writes, "I beheld the Aleph from every point and angle." The protagonist's realization that everything else is pointless is a type of loss because it upends his or her perspective.

Loss of certainty and stability also follows contact with the Real, represented by the Aleph. The protagonist narrates, "I felt dizzy and didn't know where I was." "I couldn't see the walls or the steps, but I could see everything in the room, and I felt infinite. I felt like shouting out. I felt like committing suicide." Lack of stability and confidence is a common result of experiencing the Real, which is generally seen to be puzzling and unnerving.

A sensation of grief and loss may also result from the interaction with the Real. Insinuating that coming into contact with the Real may elicit feelings of loss and mourning for what has been lost, Lacan claims that the Real "is that which always leaves a trace of itself in the symbolic." The protagonist of "The Aleph" experiences a sense of sorrow for the familiar world he has left behind after meeting the Aleph.

Both Jorge Luis Borges and Slavoj Žižek have written on the Real in their separate writings. Both authors acknowledge the elusive and ineffable quality of the Real, despite the fact that their definitions are grounded in diverse origins. In contrast to Borges's Aleph, which is a mystical object that is beyond the scope of human perception, Žižek sees the Real as something that defies symbolism and cannot be properly expressed through words. Both authors experience amazement and wonder that is beyond human comprehension after coming into contact with the Real. Additionally, Žižek and Borges both examine the connection between subjectivity and the Real. The Real, according to Žižek, is essential to human subjectivity because it serves as the "impossible kernel" that upholds our sense of self. Similar to this, Borges's protagonist in "The Aleph," who sees everything from a perspective that is both unique and universal, encounters the Real as an encounter with his own subjectivity. This emphasizes the close connection between our sense of self and identity and the Real. Finally, Žižek and Borges both underline how coming into contact with the Real may change you. The contact with the Real, in Žižek's view, is a moment of rupture that reveals the limitations of our symbolic system and creates fresh avenues for subjective experience. Similar to Borges's protagonist, who

encounters the Aleph and changes dramatically, as a result, this character gains a fresh perspective on reality and his place within it. The contact with the Real results in a reconfiguration of subjective experience and a change in the self in both situations, emphasizing the transformative power of doing so.

The psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan had a considerable impact on Slavoj Zizek's understanding of the Real. Zizek asserts that the Real is "that which resists symbolization" and is incapable of being fully conveyed verbally or visually. Because it serves as a reminder of the limitations of the symbolic order and the insufficiency of language to accurately depict reality, he contends that the Real is a crucial element of subjective experience. According to him, "The Real," which is "always that which resists symbolization, that which eludes the grasp of representation," is the condition of possibility for the symbolic order.

On the other side, Jorge Luis Borges takes a more literary and philosophical approach to the Real. The Aleph serves as a metaphor for the Real in "The Aleph," denoting a location in space from where everything is visible simultaneously. Borges is more interested in the connection between language and reality and how language can both capture and conceal the Real than Zizek is in his psychoanalytic approach. He states, "Reality is not always probable or likely," emphasizing the ineffable and elusive nature of the Real.

Zizek and Borges, despite their divergent perspectives, concur on the significance of the Real and its bearing on subjective experience. They both stress the transformational consequences of coming into contact with the Real and acknowledge the limitations of language and representation in grasping the richness of reality. While for Borges, the meeting with the Aleph results in a reconfiguration of subjective experience and a metamorphosis of the self, the contact with the Real for Zizek is a moment of rupture that opens up new possibilities for subjective experience.

3. Conclusion

The objectives of the study are to re-read those ideas that are buried under many ambiguities, including the idea of God or any other unseen power that dominates our life. In summary, Slavoj Zizek's theory of the Real provides a useful framework for understanding the transformative and unsettling effects of seeing the Aleph in Jorge Luis Borges' brief story. Fundamental to psychoanalysis is the notion of the Real, which offers a unique perspective on how one interacts with the outside world. It is possible to view the protagonist's interaction with the Aleph in "The Aleph" as a meeting with the Real.

The Real is seen in various ways by Zizek and Borges; although Borges presents a more mystical and intuitive understanding of the idea, Zizek bases his theory on psychoanalytic practice. Their emphasis on the transformational impacts of coming into contact with the Real and the significance of loss in understanding it are two areas where their philosophies do, however, overlap.

This study is a challenging paper that seeks to present a new understanding of any theological concept that cannot be read in old school methods. However, this study needs further work to reach new findings. For further study, the readers may refer to the works of Slavoj Zizek and relative theorists.

Overall, relating "The Aleph" to Zizek's notion of the Real deepens our comprehension of both the narrative and the idea of the Real. The narrative and Zizek's theory both tackle issues such as the confusing impact of discovering the Aleph, the relationship between the Real and loss, and the transformational aspect of the Real. This examination demonstrates how literature and psychoanalytic theory can interact to reveal fresh perspectives on the human condition.

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