

ESTHER FAYE

IL N'Y A PAS DE RAPPORT SEXUEL ...

Ou pire: the discourse of capitalism

Ou pire, ... or worse? What is it that could possibly be worse ... and worse than what? And why not write *the worst*? ... *ou pire* is the title of Jacques Lacan's nineteenth seminar of 1971-1972. Anticipating these same questions from his audience, Lacan begins with a comment on his choice of the adverbial form of 'pire' for his title. As an adverb, Lacan explains, "worse" calls for a verb, a verb from which it has been separated, its absence represented by the three dots of the ellipsis that precede the words "or worse." These three dots, Lacan explains, is something you see used in printed texts to mark or create an empty place—something, a word, and in this instance a verb, that should be there has been deliberately omitted. And so Lacan goes on to say: "My title underlines the importance of this empty place." Why? Because it is the only way of catching something *with* language that is not *of* language; in other words, something of the real.

In this middle period of Lacan's teaching—the late 60's to early 70's—when he began to elaborate a theory of discourse as a logical writing of the structure of relations between speaking beings—that is, as a social bond that takes the real of jouissance into account—for this is what is really at stake in discourse, he concluded that the only way language can say something about the real is by allowing this empty place to be preserved ... with the use of language. This empty place is what a saying [*un dire*] preserves as act: "That one might say remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard" [*Qu'on dise reste oublié derrière ce qui se dit dans ce qui s'entend*] ("L'Étourdit" 5). Lacan arrives at the term "*un dire*"—the saying that he will bring into play in ... *ou pire*—by tipping over the first letter of the word "*pire*" and then, to make it function as argument in logic, converting "*dire*"—to say—into "*un dire*"—a saying. With a particular saying—*il n' y a pas de rapport sexuel*, there is no sexual relation—one of a related series of sayings Lacan was formulating around this time, the real that is proper to psychoanalysis and which the ellipsis indexes, the real as the impossible to say, the real as unsayable, is thus marked with language.

Lacan warns that in trying to dodge this saying you can only say *worse* (... *Ou Pire* 11-12). Using propositional and modal logic Lacan undertook in ... *ou pire* to elabo-

rate this saying—there is no sexual relation—and that of another, one that would be a response to it, that would moreover not try to get out of it and thus say worse. This saying is “*Y a d' l' Un*” or rather *Yad'lun* (turning it into a *one* saying)—there is something of One, the One all alone not the One of union. There is something of One that can function as a placeholder for the hole of the real. A singular One, a master signifier that as letter names the singularity of the subject's *jouissance* identity.

But the worse has already been forgotten in what has been said in what is heard. I am referring to the saying of the capitalist discourse, the *matheme* of which Lacan wrote only once in a lecture he gave in Italy in 1972 (“*Du discours psychanalytique*”). And this saying worse is precisely the effect of the capitalist discourse's foreclosure of the impossible real of the sexual non-rapport, that is, the foreclosure of the saying that sustains the emptiness brought into real ex-sistence through the operation of language on the living being—castration. My argument here is that the reality this foreclosure generates is far worse—*ou pire*—than the impossible real of the lack of the sexual relation.

Castration is not fantasy, it is real (Lacan, The sinthome 107)

We know that there is a general and deeply held belief in the existence of the sexual relation. It is a universal dream, we could say, the dream of Eros, the principle of union, of two making One that Lacan calls in *...ou pire* a gross mythology he was determined to exorcise. An archaic version of such a belief can be seen in the comic fable recounted by the poet Aristophanes, one that has taken on mythological status, when he takes his turn at the table in Plato's *Symposium* to speak on the topic of love. In it, he derives the ancient and powerful desire of one human being to join up with another in what he calls human nature—a powerful drive to reunite what was once original nature, expressing itself as a “seeking to make one out of two, to heal the state of man.” To heal, in other words, the cut perpetrated by Zeus as punishment for mankind's hubris in attacking the gods that divided the original unity or oneness of human beings. The significance of this little story that makes a myth of subjective division, is that each half of the severed being is destined to always look for their original other half. In other words, the desire of two to become one again is the very expression of an ancient need which Aristophanes called desire and the pursuit of the One love.

Myth, as Russell Grigg explains, “is a kind of logical instrument for resolving contradictions.” There is a logical contradiction at the heart of the myth that insists as “a point of impossibility.” In other words, at the heart of any myth we find an unsayable real—the impossible real for which Lacan gave the modal formulation “that which never ceases not being written in the unconscious.” As such this real cannot be reduced or resolved but, as Lacan says, it can be marked as such—it can be circumscribed. Which is precisely what a myth does—it is a circumscription. Or as Grigg puts it: “The myth is a fictional story woven around a point of impossibility, or the real,” and its function is to provide “a fictional papering over for

the impossible, real kernel around which the myth is constructed and for which it was originally formulated” (Grigg 55). Now we might take Aristophanes’ mythical story of a primal unity and the desire it leaves behind, of seeking to make one out of two as comedic fiction, as a comical treatment of a point of real that cannot be resolved, the point of real in this case being the impossibility of making one from two, in other words, of establishing the sexual relation. When people say, I say what I mean, or I always speak the truth, we should not forget the saying that underpins such statements—it is that *there is* a sexual relation, that is, that it exists. There is however a non-comedic outcome of such a saying, one that stems precisely from the foreclosure by the capitalist discourse of the impossible real of the sexual non-rapport, a saying that takes us to something worse. I will return to this.

Castration is however not a fable, it is not a fiction, it is not a myth—it is real. It is the real effect of language on the living being, an effect that precludes any possibility of there being a sexual relation. What does this mean? As Lacan says in “...ou pire, Compte Rendu du Séminaire 1971-1972,” there is no measurable relation [*rapport*], that is, there is no calculable ratio of sexual jouissance that can be universalized between speaking beings (Lacan 549). The non-rapport of the sexes is integral to the very fact that a human being is a speaking being, an être parlant. “I have also defined the sexual relation as that which ‘doesn’t stop not being written.’ There is an impossibility therein. It is also that nothing can speak it—there is no existence of the sexual relation in the act of speaking” (Lacan, *Encore* 144-45). And it is sexual jouissance itself, that is, the jouissance that is our lot because of castration, which is simply the cut of the signifier, which bars access to the sexual relation (Lacan, ... ou pire 31). The subject, as supposed to the signifier which represents it for another signifier, the support of itself as *parlêtre*, can appear *qua* subject only on the basis of loss, the loss of an absolute form of jouissance that does not exist (there is no Other of the Other). And yet, although irrecoverable, the subject will seek to recover what does not exist through the very means, that is through the symbolic and imaginary semblances of language that effected this primordial loss in the first place. Exiled from the sexual relation, that is, from the possibility of establishing a sexual relation with the Other, of making One from two, the subject will attempt to seek compensation via the surplus jouissance objects around which their drive will turn endlessly in fantasy. Imagining the possibility of overcoming castration, yet memorializing its very impossibility in this attempt to make up for it—in fantasy—the subject does not know they are already enjoying, in their symptom and in their affects, “everything that marks in each of us the trace of his exile.” As speaking beings we are *exiled* from the One of the sexual relation, condemned to the semblance of a sexual relation in and through discourse, to the contingency of an encounter “that momentarily gives the illusion that the sexual relation stops not being written [...]—an illusion that something is not only articulated but inscribed [...] by which, for a while—a time during which things are suspended—what would constitute the sexual relation finds its trace and its mirage-like path in the being who speaks” (Lacan, *Encore* 145).

To grasp this notion of exile, and of the sought for illusion that the sexual relation can be written in the unconscious, it is necessary to say something more about the Lacanian concept of the unconscious. What follows here is I believe pertinent to my later discussion of the capitalist discourse. The German word that has been translated as *The Unconscious* gives a clearer idea of its true sense in Freud: *das Unbewusste*. Although the adjectival form from which this noun has been formed, 'bewusste,' can be translated as conscious, and *unbewusste* therefore as unconscious, its first listed meaning derives from the verb "wissen," 'to know,' to have knowledge of, and correlatively *unbewusste* 'to not know.' I am making something of this etymology because I want to emphasize the fundamental characteristic of the unconscious—of a knowledge that is unknown, that is, unknown to the subject. Unknown, not only in the sense that, as Freud explained, one can only assume the existence, or rather *ex-sistence*, of the unconscious—it is a postulate, a necessary one however; it can only be supposed on the basis of the traces left behind from the first encounters with the Other, traces that appear in a camouflaged way in the formations of the unconscious—dreams, bungled acts, slips, that is, lapses of the tongue and pen, forgetting and, of course, symptoms and affects as I referenced earlier—but unknown also in a much more fundamental way. As Lacan was able to show, Freud's conceptualization of the primary repressed, *das Urverdrängung*, constitutes the unconscious as a hole, a kernel of emptiness. This kernel is not merely repressed knowledge; it is knowledge as radically irrecoverable. It took someone like Lacan to draw out the radical nature of this primary repressed as the primordial object foreclosed to the human subject, topologically both outside and inside the subject at the same time—as *ex-timate*. This truly radical concept of the unconscious as a knowledge in the real is fundamental to (but as beyond) the very constitution of the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, the unconscious structured like a language, the more usual understanding of the Lacanian unconscious. The unconscious as a place of unconscious knowledge without the subject is what Lacan's concept of *lalangue* references, a kind of un-known knowledge in which signifiers as *un-chained* symbolic elements carry something real, namely the real of jouissance.

An early sense of this real dimension of the unconscious can be seen in Lacan's eleventh seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. There he speaks of the unconscious as an opening and closing: as a split, a gap, an interval in time, an unborn, a non-realized, and yet through this a-temporal gap some-thing speaks—*ça parle*. It speaks, not I speak (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 22-23).¹ Although not formulated expressly by Lacan at this time, in 1964, the notion of the unconscious speaking without a subject will eventuate in the recognition that it is jouissance that is spoken, and most saliently in the symptom as an event of the body: "What speaks, whatever it is, is that which enjoys itself as body, that which enjoys a body that is lived" (... *ou pire* 151). And yet what is also born in the gap of this unknown knowledge is the very possibility of desire: from that which presents itself as a *lack in being* comes a *want to be*—(*manque à être*)—to be that which was foreclosed to the subject *qua* subject on entry into the game of language. Lacan uses Pascal's

wager about the existence or non-existence of God to make the point that we have no choice but to enter the game of language, of heads or tails, money or your life, death or life, a game in which we have always-already lost (*D'un Autre à l'autre*). And it is this loss that has the status as the real of a jouissance presumed lost to the subject, that is the cause of both the subject's unconscious desire and their compulsion to repeat—to repeat what Lacan in *Seminar XVII* refers to as the ruinous search for the lost jouissance of themselves as living beings, even to the point of going against life itself! What is to be noted here is that the unconscious comes at this time to be theorized by Lacan as an apparatus fitted out by language for the repetition of jouissance. For what necessitates repetition, the engine of desire, the search for a sexual jouissance that would be restored to the subject, is precisely a *point of impossibility* in the very structure of discourse, the very thing that the capitalist discourse forecloses.

Although Lacan never discarded the concept of the subject as a being spoken by language, but also essentially as a being who speaks, an être parlant—"the human being, called thus undoubtedly because he is only the *humus* of language" (*The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 51)—in his later teachings he invented a new term for this being in whom speech and jouissance are inseparable—*parlêtre*. Written as one word *parlêtre* glues together two words—'parler' to speak, and 'être,' being. But together these also evoke the phrase, *par lettre*, by the letter, alluding thus to the real element carried in the signifier by the speaking being. This real element is the foundation of the saying that Lacan elaborates in his seminar ... *Ou pire—Yad'lun*, there is a One-all-alone. There is something of One, a master signifier that represents the subject at the level of its singular mode of jouissance. With *parlêtre*, Lacan introduced a subtle but significant shift in the concept of the unconscious and simultaneously in the concept of the subject of the unconscious. For the *parlêtre* now becomes the very name of this subject of the unconscious in its *real* dimension. An unconscious no longer to be understood simply as the unconscious structured as a language, as the discourse of the Other, but the unconscious as real.² The *parlêtre*-unconscious is the real subject with a body that enjoys itself, for the most real of the subject is as enjoying substance; this is an unconscious that enjoys [*jouit*], and in enjoying [*jouissant*] speaks: "I speak with my body and I do so unbeknownst to myself" (*Encore* 119).

Apparolé to the capitalist discourse

"The subject, who is called human, no doubt because he is only the *humus* of language, has only to *apparoler* himself to this apparatus," to the structure immanent in speech (Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 51, modified trans.).³ Discourse, if we are to follow Lacan, is a logical writing of little letters that inscribe a particular social bond that represents the relations of speech and jouissance between subjects as speaking beings. And it does so—each discourse doing so differently—as a way of making up for the fact that there is no possibility of a sexual relation, for there is no natural social/sexual relation between subjects, and none such especially be-

tween what is fundamentally at stake for all subjects, the jouissance specific to the discourse in which they are *apparelés*. Lacan's neologism *apparelé* is fundamentally equivocal. The French word *parole* refers to the function of speech and language in the constitution of the subject and evokes the sense of the subject as fitted out in and by language, thus putting the emphasis on the status of language as semblance. But the prefix 'a,' this little letter that alludes to Lacan's *objet petit a*, announces something beyond semblance—the real that as remainder of the operation of language functions *nachträglich* as cause, the cause of the speaking being, the *parlêtre*. To be *apparelé* is thus the condition of being fitted out in the terms of the specific discourse(s) one inhabits but also essentially characterises the position of the subject in discourse in relation to their real. As the 'a' indicates, to be *apparelé* is not merely the condition of being apparelled, as with an item of clothing that one can adorn oneself in and take off at will; language has effects that go beyond the semblances that construct our reality: "The subject is not only represented by language ... he is in addition produced as an effect, a real effect of language which transforms the organism" (Soler, *Vers l'identité* 32). Language, in other words, touches the real.

Turning now to the capitalist discourse (if it is a discourse) to which subjects are *apparelés*, I now ask: what exactly are the effects of this discourse on subjects and what might qualify it as producing a *worse saying*? The capitalist discourse has recently received increasing attention from a number of Lacanian psychoanalysts and my discussion of it here is indebted to their insights. Lacan had commented on capitalism sporadically from early in his teaching but it was only in 1968, understandable given what was happening in the world at the time, that he began to examine it more concertedly.⁴ A few years later, in a lecture he gave at the University of Milan, "*Du discours psychanalytique*," he mathematized capitalism as a discourse for the first time and in so doing indicated in what ways it challenged not only the very status of discourse but in particular the psychoanalytic discourse, or as he had formulated it a little earlier, the discourse of the psychoanalyst. In this lecture Lacan laid out what he considered to be the foundation stone of psychoanalytic discourse—that it is founded on the play of signifiers, namely that the signifier slips in relation to meaning—*Le jeu des signifiants*, ça glisse au sens. With the verb "slip" we hear the possibility of making a *blunder*, a lapsus which, as Lacan states in "Preface to the English-Language Edition" of *Seminar XI*, indicates the presence of the unconscious, the unconscious as real (Lacan, "Preface" vii). The practice and effectiveness of psychoanalytic discourse depends on this very possibility, on the possibility of the *parlêtre* analysand slipping up in speaking, a slipping made possible by the fact that there is no signifier whose meaning is assured. Hence the possibility of the analysand saying something more or less than intended, and saying something that unbeknownst to them touches a real. A psychoanalytic session relies on this possibility in speech, of a slip falling from the lips of the analysand and thereby revealing an unintended sense—in meaning and direction. Speech takes the analysand towards something real, the real of their jouissance.

It is this very principle of language's equivocality that is not only the fundamental condition of psychoanalytic discourse, it is also, said Lacan, what characterizes what we, that is psychoanalysts, refer to as man.

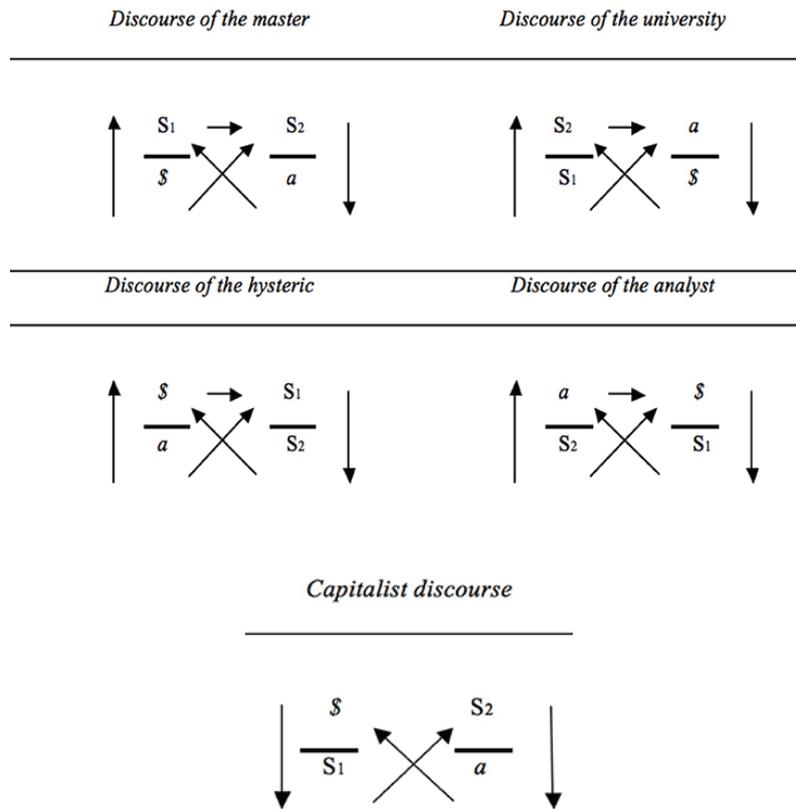
But it is a fact that psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic practice has shown us the radical character of the effect of the signifier in this constitution of the world. I do not say for the being who speaks, because what I called this skidding [ce dérapage, slip-up] a moment ago, this sliding which is done with the signifying apparatus ... this is what determines being in the one who speaks. The word being has no other meaning outside of language [emphasis and ellipsis in original].

But the radical effects of language go even further than constituting the world and the being that speaks. The play of signifying slippage disrupts any possible natural or harmonious relation between man and his objects and this is evident in the fact that not only is the signified not primary, before it is produced in the wake of the signifier—and Lacan quickly added that we would be rushing too quickly if we think that the purpose of language is to produce the signified and signification—“there is something more primary than the effects of signification.” What could be more primary? We are assured, said Lacan, of the presence of a subject *in the real* if we have before us a subject who is capable of using the signifier as such, which means, to make use of the play of the signifier not to signify something but precisely to *deceive* us as to what there is to be signified. So in Lacan's view, the primary purpose of the signifier is not to produce sense or signification, and it is not even to *re-present* the subject that is supposed to the signifier, that is as a barred subject represented by a signifier for another signifier and as therefore lacking-in-being, but to produce a *real subject*, a subject in which there is a *jouissance* proper to it—in other words, a *parlêtre*. To produce in other words, the *parlêtre*-unconscious.

That is, I hasten to add, if the particular discourse to which the subject is *apparoilé* will allow it. I say this because of what Lacan then goes on to say in relation to the capitalist discourse. We are in the time of crisis because something no longer goes around, something has stopped turning. This is not the crisis of the discourse of the master, as many are still banging on about, that is, a crisis in the failure of the position of the father in current social arrangements, for the discourse of the old *pater-master* has already given way to that of the university. The crisis we face is due to the fact that the capitalist discourse turns only on itself; there is no movement possible from it to any of the other discourses and, moreover, the movement internal to the capitalist discourse is fundamentally different from that in the other discourses. What the four discourses Lacan named have in common—the discourse of the master, the hysteric, the university and the analyst—is that they each turn on a common point of impossibility, the impossibility of the sexual relation. I stress this condition of impossibility for it is this that allows these discourses to rotate and thus turn from one to the other, and it is precisely this condition that is fore-closed in the capitalist discourse. In each of the four discourses *something* remains impossible; something is barred from being brought into the field of semblance.

This is the effect of castration as real. In this sense alone the capitalist discourse cannot be considered a true discourse that constitutes a social bond.

Each discourse consists of the same four little letters—S1, S2, *a*, and \$—that rotate via a quarter turn to the left and, starting from the bottom left, occupy in turn the four fixed places in the structure—those of truth; agent/semblance/desire/symptom; the worker/other/jouissance; and product/surplus jouissance—whichever letter that occupies the place of agent (in the top left position), giving the discourse its name. The barrier of jouissance determines that the product or surplus jouissance of the discourse, (surplus jouissance, *Mehrlust* in German, which Lacan exposed as being what is really at stake in Marx's concept of surplus value, *Mehrwert*) can never meet up with the place of truth underlying the place of agent/semblance/desire (*D'un Autre à l'autre* 172-173). The circle cannot be closed; there is an unbridgeable barrier. And precisely because of this, castration is brought into play each time a discourse shifts from one discourse to the next, the turning revealing the unconscious truth that underlay the agent of the previous discourse and that now through the turning occupies the place of agent.⁵



To repeat: it is precisely this barrier of impossibility that the capitalist discourse disables. In the discourse of the capitalist, the truth incarnated in the master signifier is now not only directly accessible to the subject—note the downward vector from the divided subject in the place of agent to the master signifier in the place of truth—but also that this master *must* be passed through in order to reach the scientific/technological knowledge—note the vector from truth to knowledge—through which surplus jouissance embedded in the products of capitalism flow to the subject—note the vector from product to agent. In none of the other discourses does the product of surplus jouissance, in whatever letter it is embedded, be that S1, S2, \$ or object *a*, come directly to the subject. That happens only in the capitalist discourse and this is precisely the effect of the foreclosure of castration. In the capitalist discourse, it is the masked master, the brand names of the capitalist market, as Stijn Vanheule nominates this master to be, that occupies the place of truth—an inversion of the discourse of the master, the very discourse that is also equated with the structure of the unconscious.

This has far-reaching consequences—to the status of the subject as well as to the endurance of social bonds. Within the logic of the other four discourses we can see that loss is incurred from the very outset because the one in the position of agent has to go via the other, the place where their desire hopes to meet up with some knowledge about the jouissance of their lost being, for this is the question being raised for the subject. But the product resulting from this operation is never *all* the jouissance that was aimed for, only a more and/or less of jouissance—surplus jouissance. Even more disturbing to the subject is the fact that desire can never make this *not-all* jouissance product reach the place of the agent's unconscious truth; there is, as I have already noted, a barrier constituted by the only jouissance permitted to subjects as speaking beings. So in the social bonds constituted within the terms of this logic, the subject remains necessarily divided from the truth of their singular mode of jouissance, divided from, in other words, the proper name of the singular jouissance of their symptom; the singular way in which they have, in these four discourses, made up for the fact that there is no sexual relation.

However, within the logic of the capitalist discourse the subject does not have to go via the other in the hope of meeting up with a knowledge of their jouissance and of thereby creating some form of social bond. Seeking an answer to the question of their subjective division and to the dissatisfaction it may generate, the subject in the capitalist discourse is directed to seek it directly via the master signifiers of capitalism. Any possibility of a bond with the other is necessarily via this master. But what is arrested through the rupturing of the social bond between agent and other is the very possibility of the equivocity, that is, the play of signifiers, Lacan regarded as so fundamental to the definition of man as a speaking being. The capitalist discourse goes around and around continuously like a roulette table, apparently unstoppable, and the effect of this is that the necessary impasse of the non-rapport is no longer an obstacle. At the same time then that capitalism necessarily cultivates ersatz forms of dissatisfaction and discontent, it offers a fantasy of

completeness. The capitalist discourse is in fact predicated on making the sexual relation exist. Its fundamental yet deceptive promise is that we can have all we desire, that satisfaction via the objects of surplus jouissance is attainable.

The subject, as Irène Foyentin has remarked, is thus reduced to *what* she/he desires—the objects of surplus jouissance that pull the subject into consumption—not *that* he/she desires (Foyentin 59). Desire does not have to pass via the signifiers of the Other to be there confronted with the enigma of the Other's desire and the question in turn of the subject's desire. Instead the promise of the realization of the sexual relation now comes to the subject as homogenised and collectivised objects of consumption, these ready-made gadgets of capitalist production that we as subjects reduced to our status as consumers are commanded to enjoy. Desire is in effect reduced to demand. As Colette Soler has argued, capitalism has no interest in the truth of the subject's desire and the singular jouissance that desire aims at. Rather its sole interest is in managing the jouissance of the capitalist subject by feeding the pseudo-desire it creates with “*lathouse*” objects that render the subject anonymous to itself. In line with the psychoanalytic understanding of perversion, the only universal right capitalism is interested in is the right to enjoy—*jouis—encore, encore!* And the *encore* is guaranteed through the cunning of the capitalist discourse. The jouissance of consumption can never be satisfied, frustration is built into the very principle of its logic: the more I consume, the more I need to/have to consume. As *appariolé* to the capitalist discourse, the subject is thus reduced to the status of *proletarian* (Soler, “Sujets appariolés”). It was Marx, as Lacan pointed out, who must be credited with having revealed the truth of capitalist discourse as the proletariat: “The proletariat means what? It means that work is radicalized at the level purely and simply of merchandise, which means that it reduces the worker himself to the same rate” (*D'un Autre à l'autre* 172-173).

A proletarian is thus a subject reduced to the same unit value of the merchandise they produce, for the effect of the absolutization of the market is to reduce all *life* “to an element of value.” As Renata Salecl has noted:

The prediction is that in the future almost everything will be a paid-for experience in which traditional reciprocal obligations and expectations—mediated by feelings of faith, empathy and solidarity—will be replaced by contractual relations in the form of paid memberships, subscriptions, admission charges, retainers and fees. (Salecl 29)

In other words, as proletarian, the subject becomes a mere *body* whose primary purpose is to consume the gadgets—whether these are objects or so-called life experiences—produced by the capitalist machine, and to be consumed by them. Reduced thus to the equivalence and value of objects, the modern subject as proletarian is left with very little with which to form a social bond, for the body on its own is not enough with which to create a social bond (Soler 2011, 35, citing Lacan 1975 [1974], 177-203).⁶ So it is not surprising that the bonds of love as well as ties to place have become precarious, for as Lacan said:

What distinguishes the discourse of Capitalism is that the *Verwerfung*, the rejection—the rejection outside of any symbolic exchange, with what I already said it has as consequences. The rejection of what? Of castration. All order, all discourse that akin to capitalism leaves aside what we simply call the things of love, my good friends.” (*The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst* 103)

Conclusion

Colette Soler has written about the precarity of what she calls the generalized proletariat, those who having lost their relations of solidarity with each other are thereby more exposed to insecurity and loneliness. This is surely a worse. But what is perhaps even worse is what this precarity (and not just dissatisfaction and frustration) can lead to—to the appeal of a *One of union*—“By which I designate the identification of the Other with the One” (Lacan, *Television* 23)—a fundamentalist One that has shown itself to be murderous towards others. Lacan may have questioned whether the discourse of psychoanalysis would survive,⁷ but he had the certainty of presentiment that something worse would be born from the capitalist discourse—to which he gave the name *PST*. Spelled out, these letters form the word “*peste*,” the French word for plague or pestilence, an ironic reference to what Freud believed he had brought to the United States with psychoanalysis.⁸ The *PST* would truly be a pestilential discourse, a scourge in the service of the capitalist discourse. It would be the worse of a *jouissance* taken to the extreme already manifest in rising levels of hatred, religious intolerance and racism. With capitalism’s foreclosure of castration and its co-optation of scientific universalism, the singularity of subjects as embodied in their fundamental symptom is at stake. The homogenization of subjects as equally free to consume, the only freedom capitalism is interested in, and the extreme individualism to which we are pushed, can only result in more and more segregation. The building of walls is the logical attempt to make up for the social bond that is in default in today’s world, described by Colette Soler as the logic of segregation.⁹ Slavoj Žižek has also noted this:

... age-old fixations, and particular, substantial ethnic, religious and cultural identities, have returned with a vengeance. Our predicament today is defined by this tension: the global free circulation of commodities is accompanied by growing separations in the social sphere. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of the global market, new walls have begun emerging everywhere, separating peoples and their cultures. (Žižek 7)

The fascination with populist nationalisms gaining momentum in the world today is premised on this logic. A single quote from a speech by Donald Trump alerts us to the resurfacing of an old danger: that of the murderous exclusionism of extreme nationalism and its potential to end in fascism through its elevation of the *Volk*, constituted as such in identification with a mad master—“the only important thing is the unification of the people, because the other people don’t mean anything” (Cited in Müller).¹⁰ This would truly be the return of the real as *peste*. I wrote at

another time of the drama of Nazism as the fascination of sacrifice on behalf of a *Fuehrer* and of the ego ideal the Leader incarnated.¹¹ Although Trump is not Hitler, perhaps we can see something of the latter's discourse resurfacing in the Trumpism of MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN. This is the danger of a discourse about which Lacan had already in 1964 thought necessary to warn us. At that time, he spoke of the "drama of Nazism" as a re-enactment of "the most monstrous and supposedly superseded forms of the holocaust," the resurgence of which the predominant forms of historical critique (Hegelian-Marxist) could not account for. I believe we are witnessing such a resurgence again—think of the privileged world's responses to the forced mass movements of peoples; the terror and terrifying conditions in which those who cannot flee live; and the formation of One Nation politics around the world: Brexit; Donald Trump; Pauline Hanson; Australia's Detention Camps; etc. In my view, what Lacan said at the very end of the last session of *Seminar XI* to account for the resurgence of "the holocaust" still holds good today:

... the offering to obscure gods of an object of sacrifice is something to which few subjects can resist succumbing, as if under some monstrous spell.

Ignorance, indifference, an averting of the eyes may explain beneath what veil this mystery still remains hidden. But for whoever is capable of turning a courageous gaze towards this phenomenon—and, once again, there are certainly few who do not succumb to the fascination of the sacrifice in itself—the sacrifice signifies that, in the object of our desires, we try to find evidence for the presence of the desire of this Other that I call here *the dark God*. (*The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 275, emphasis in original)

As we know, the ideal of purity and non-division at that time required the enslavement and extermination of all those others who were seen to threaten the unity of the One People, *das Volk*. Those who threaten this fantasy of the imaginary unity of "the Other and the One," the mystical One crudely brought to life by Aristophanes as "the beast-with-two-backs" (Lacan, *Television* 23), have to be expelled, for their very existence disrupts the fantasy of the *One body*. Dissent, not merely dissatisfaction, we could say, is built into the very structure of discourse, but only if the barrier of impossibility created by the castrating effect of language is sustained. The capitalist discourse removes this barrier; foreclosing castration, foreclosing the impossibility of the sexual relation—as happens in psychosis—it is difficult to see how, despite the clear evidence of protests around the world in response to the excesses of capitalism, the discourse of capitalism itself could be made to shift to another that would expose its truth. The only chance for the proletariat cast adrift without ballast and driven to distraction by their quest for *lathouse* objects is, I argue, via the wager of the unconscious—the unconscious that psychoanalysts take responsibility for making ex-sist¹²—and of its symptom that incarnates the singular real of the subject's response to the non-rapport of the sexual relation.

We have this chance because, as Colette Soler has argued, the *parlêtre* is *not all appaolé* to discourse. As living beings effected and affected by language, not all of

the subject's being is ensnared by language. And this not all is essential if a subject is to emerge in the real, not just one *apparelé* to the discourse they inhabit. This not all ex-sists in the real of the symptom, in the opaque jouissance conveyed by the letter of the symptom. The symptom is not the real, for the real is impossible and the symptom is necessary, but it is the closest thing there is in the *parlêtre*, who is *pas tout apparelé* to the capitalist discourse, that preserves something of the empty space that is foreclosed in the capitalist discourse. Only such a subject with a symptom that stands against the dominant discourse has a chance of resisting the push to join up with the empty *plus de jouir* objects of capitalism. For joining up is tantamount to the suicide of the subject—a subject who in search of the social bonds which capitalism cannot provide is thus easy prey to the increasingly loud calls of populist nationalisms to sacrifice him or herself to the dark God of the One Leader, the One Nation. In contrast to the push to the *One* of the *One-Volk*, the psychoanalytic premise of the *not all*—another way of saying that there is no sexual relation—and of the singular *One* as condition for the symptom—*Yad'lun*—is, I believe, the ethical and political antidote to the ... *or worse* ushered in by the capitalist discourse.

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Notes

1. This could also be translated as "That there is a saying"

2. For an excellent introduction to this shift in the conceptualization of the unconscious, see Soler, *Lacan—The Unconscious Re-invented*.
3. As Bruce Fink, the translator of *Seminar XVII* notes, the punning of Lacan here is untranslatable. I have decided however not to use Fink's translation of "s'apparoler" as "speechify," preferring to keep the French because of the way it condenses both "speech" and "apparel," nor his translation of "appareil" as "fittings," seeing more value in using a word that is closer to the French "*cet appareil-là*" at the same time as its sound is closer to "*s'apparoler*."
4. The year 1968 is famous for being a time of generalized revolt and social disturbance in many parts of the world and especially in France. The possibility of a real revolution marked a crisis for capitalism and the socio-political regimes that sustained it and were sustained by it. Lacan engaged seriously with the question of capitalism as a discourse from his sixteenth *seminar*, *D'un Autre à l'autre* until his nineteenth ... *Ou Pire*, as well as in the series of talks at St Anne that coincided with this latter seminar, known as *Le savoir du psychanalyste* [The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst], some of which have been included in the published edition of ... *Ou Pire*.
5. The truth from which the agent is barred from knowing is represented by each one of the letters that in turn occupy the place of truth and that thereby function as the particular cause of the agent's unconscious desire.
6. In 1974, Lacan would say that even though we are so captured/captivated by gadgets these could still function as symptoms, for example, the car as like a false woman—"une fausse femme"—that is, it has phallic value.
7. This was discussed by Lacan in *La troisième* in 1974, but was also raised in his talk in Milan in 1972, as well as in other texts.
8. Lacan may have also intended with PST to evoke the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, harbingers of the Last Judgment, the name for one of these being Pestilence. See Braunschtein's remarks on PST as the pestilential discourse in the service of capitalism.
9. See Soler, *Vers l'identité*, see esp. session 6 May 1975, as well as in other of her writings.
10. On the power of fascination in the relationship between subjects identified with each other via identification with a leader, see S. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921c), SE XVIII, Ch. 8 Being in Love and Hypnosis.
11. The paper to which I refer is "A Solid Hatred Addressed to Being."
12. On the responsibility of the discourse of the analyst in making the unconscious exist, see esp. Lacan, *Television*, 14.