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THE CAPITALIST EXEMPTION¹

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A Discourse without Loss

Below is the matheme of the capitalist discourse:² The matheme is constructed by inverting the terms found in the places of the semblance (or of the agent) and truth in the discourse of the master: $\$$ is now in the position of S_1 and vice versa. The direction of the arrow between $\$$ and S_1 remains unchanged, so that, in the capitalist discourse, it now moves from the top to the bottom. As a final modification, the arrow that had gone from a to S_1 moves from a to $\$$. The consequences of these changes require some comments.

(Place of the agent or semblance) $\downarrow \frac{\$}{S_1} \times \frac{S_2}{a} \downarrow$
(Place of the truth)

Pleasure, like unpleasure, is a physiological reality. Jouissance is of a different order; if it does not exist without the body—the body as organism—it also does not exist without knowledge. In skipping the barrier of jouissance, it also skips an obstacle, the nature of which gives rise to a promise that can be kept only through annihilation. Jouissance is a “negative substance.” This means that by speaking, I destroy myself as thing and that this self-virtualization would provide me with jouissance precisely if I were not, as a candidate for jouissance, annihilated by this very candidacy.³ How can we get out of this—infernal—circle, even though those tormented by Satan (and this may well be Satan’s hope) have the chance to participate in jouissance through his dark side; this dark side, in turn, is not as bad as vanity, abandonment, or an emptiness of affect, to use the most common vocabulary. The central thread of this questioning has been woven in and out through the space/time of thought, and the relief, even the enthusiasm of the postwar period was degraded through its emphasis on the absurd, the herald of which was Albert Camus, in *The Rebel*.

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The Milan lecture, in June 1972, entitled, “On the Psychoanalytic Discourse,” introduces the matheme of the capitalist discourse; through it, Lacan, brings out this impact of this use of language and suggests a way out of this nightmarish Moebius strip, provided that we are able to seize upon this exit. Perhaps an example—an unusual one for this context—may help us grasp what is at stake in this problem. In an analytic session, you go deliberately against Freud’s advice not to look for information about how things “really” happened, and say to a female analysand, “You could ask your mother about this.” During the next session, she tells you, “I couldn’t ask my mother anything,” and then adds, “It’s like the time when my mother asked me, ‘Whom do you prefer: your father or me?’” Nothing could stop her from hearing the analyst’s speech as coming from the Other of the transference. The analyst’s enunciation was reduced to the mother’s, who, by her question, had closed the child up in a transference cage: either you prefer me, or you don’t really love me. For this analysand, to ask the mother anything, no matter how small, meant answering in a way that she had not wanted to do at the time: I prefer you. As a result, she could only see her analyst as her mother’s ally. The analyst, whom she had wanted to become her liberator, became her jailer.

By starting with this slippage (which was not as unfortunate as it may seem, since it helped the analysand to say something new about the closing-off of her relation with her mother) we can look for the prototype of the exit from the capitalist discourse. How? Let’s examine things more closely. The demand contained in the analyst’s initial suggestion has its own signification: this demand can be understood “objectively” by approaching it simply in terms of its vocabulary and syntax. The analysand, however, hears it on a plane that is not empty, and which modifies its “objective” signification, so that following this suggestion would be the equivalent of accepting what she has always refused the mother: to mold herself into a transference relation with her that would not be exclusive, but would take precedence over others. This is not far from this analysand’s remark that she had thought that the analyst was asking her, indirectly, to treat her relation with him as more important than everything else. Let us say that *every signification is heard on a plane that always affects the message: a meaning [sens] is produced that was not contained in the signification*. The “skidding of the signifier” means that the latter is received on a plane that is always itself slippery. It is slippery because receiving a message is a function, on the one hand, of its content and its emitter, and on the other hand, of the relation between the receiver and the emitter, a relation called transference. If we consider this fact in all its breadth, we conclude, as Lacan notes, that it is possible to make a word say something very different from what it says. Someone who claims to be an atheist can be shown to believe in God, or—and this is my example—psychoanalytic theory can be shown to say something that is, in reality, the opposite of what one thinks it says, etc. Now, although in my first example, this sliding may seem to be a disadvantage—perhaps an unacceptable one—for the treatment,

it is really quite the contrary. Through this misunderstanding, the subject can preserve, or rather bring into existence, the margin of indeterminacy that will enable her to grasp the forced choice of alienation and make it the symptomatic means of her emancipation. For the neurotic, this will be through the separation produced by the fantasy; for the psychotic, it will be through the specific space that authorizes him/her to have a delusion. True separation can be encountered, however, only once the fantasy has been dismantled and “stabilized in a delusional metaphor.”⁵

What does this have to do with the capitalist discourse? It takes us to the very heart of the question: Hollywood films, such as *The Truman Show* or *Being John Malkovich*, portray people’s efforts to escape from a virtualization that seeks to program them entirely; this virtualization turns a stage or film set into reality, and thus reduces it to nothing more than the application (in the mathematical sense) of a linguistic function forged by an Other. It is as if the capitalist discourse were capable of turning itself into a universe: me, clone; you, hologram. Escaping from this virtualization involves making the barrier of jouissance—which the capitalist discourse has scrapped—function again. In psychoanalytic terms, this would dissolve the drive into the unconscious. From Jean Baudrillard to the multimedia artist, Tony Oursler, the theme of the cunning triumph of virtualization has now been fully sketched out. This may also be what a psychoanalyst, Jean-Claude Maleval, is aiming at when he uses the expression, “foreclosure of reference.”⁵ I myself especially like the French children’s show, *Bonne nuit les petits* [*Good Night, Children*], in which Oscar, the nephew of Nounours, the Teddy bear, turns himself off with the remote control; this shows us that virtualization can only succeed through the initiative of the agent who is also its object.

Let us look at it from a different perspective, that of Orwell’s *1984*. Winston Smith begins to fall in love with what he ascribes to Big Brother: both the command to submit to a sacrificial castration and its enactment. Here it seems as though love itself, the emotion of love, can emerge alchemically from an annihilation to which one consents. This is not a baseless notion, provided that we see that this transformation of the emotion does away with Big Brother, since Big Brother is nothing other than the great persecutor as such.⁶

As we have seen, the unrestrained skidding of the signifier is connected with the fluctuations of all signification. Let’s examine this in terms of meaning [*sens*]. How can this be understood? In this lecture, Lacan reminds us that S_1 , the One of the signifier, rotates through each of the places in the discourse: those of the semblance, the other, the production and the truth. Because it can be translated from one discourse to another, a meaning [*sens*] can be born. This thesis is found explicitly in “*L’étourdit*.”⁷ Meaning, as distinct from signification, implies that the signifier can be translated. There is meaning only to the extent that there exists something that is outside a purely denotative language; this “outside” is speech itself, inasmuch as it supposes a subject.

A question can be raised here. Was Lacan correct to use the term, “discourse,” in describing the functioning of capitalism? A first error must be eliminated here—let us remember that a discourse is not a set of words, but, in the phrase “capitalist discourse,” designates the social bond that stems from the domination of the capitalist mode of production. In a way, the term “discourse” has been substituted for that of “mode of production,” and throws light on certain aspects of the latter. Nevertheless, does the absence of the disjunction that is internal to *jouissance* discredit the expression, “discourse,” in the Lacanian sense? This objection is more difficult. In order not to respond too hurriedly, I will simply remark that the barrier of *jouissance* is not really the condition *sine qua non* of discourse. Another condition stands in this place: as Lacan reminds us in this lecture, there is no discourse that is not of the semblance [*semblant*]. The unchecked skidding of the signifier allows us to exit from the aporia of *jouissance*, but discourse, because it involves the semblance, prevents this skidding from becoming so uncontrolled that it would destroy the bond assured by the function of language. If language gives prominence to the skidding of the signifier and the signifier’s claim to make an absolute meaning of the whole, the semblance [*semblant*] or *sens blanc* [white meaning], is different; its separation from these tendencies allows us exchanges that can have an acceptable level of misunderstandings. The objective of theater is to make this semblance implode, or rather to reveal the conditions that allow it to function, conditions that would otherwise remain unperceived.⁸ It happens that, in the capitalist discourse, $\$$ occupies the place of the semblance. If the absence of the barrier of *jouissance* has a major consequence for this subject, the very fact that it occupies the place of the semblance has a stabilizing effect: it enables the discourse to ward off the inordinate skidding of the signified.

The semblance is what, despite the complete impossibility of *jouissance* and of the slipping of the signifier, enables language, through discourse, to create a bond and ensure a regulation and circulation of *jouissance*; it is able, in principle, to distance us from the specters of mania or of a *passage à l’acte*, both of which are ways of putting an end to this bond. The price of this is the conventionality and artificiality of linguistic exchange, which makes the search for the truth of meaning into a bargain; we get it at a cut price. There is a touch of the vacuum when truth goes on sale.

In this context, I would like to introduce another unusual but, I hope, suggestive example: the pharmacist plays a major role in this discourse, for the capitalist subject believes that this figure can reveal what s/he desires. Surprisingly, the pharmacist becomes important by refusing to sell a product.⁹ Through this trick, the capitalist discourse demonstrates its superiority in its grasp of desire. It substitutes desire for need, which it does not satisfy; the proletarian, who would like to have public housing, is offered an estate, thereby placing the consumer as subject in command. From then on, the subject’s desire—as consumer and customer—becomes the effect of the reformulation—or interpretation—of the demand by the other, the pharmacist, who is located in S_2 . In the matheme of the capitalist discourse, this circuit goes from $\$$ to S_2 , by way of S_1 , and thus by means of a master signifier. This principle of author-

ity is concealed (since it is *under* the subject), but it is always necessary, in order to certify the kind of knowledge that is in question. In experimental psychology, its trace can be found in the Stockholm syndrome as well as in those chilling experiments that show how submission to authority can turn almost anyone into a torturer. In the matheme, the rising diagonal of the arrow that goes from S_1 to S_2 points to this power, which can be found at any moment. Throughout history, only the discourse of science forged by Descartes' *dubito, sum* has been able to make it totter or tremble, without abolishing it.

The arrow, $a \rightarrow S$, is found in both the capitalist and the analytic discourses, but it functions in them in completely opposed ways.¹⁰ In the analytic discourse, it is marked by an impossibility. In the capitalist discourse, however, surplus-jouissance (*a*) is supposed to saturate the lack-of-jouissance [*manque-à jouir*]. Whereas the capitalist discourse promotes the submission of knowledge to a masked authority, the discourse of the analyst writes a permanent disjunction between the master signifier and knowledge, a disjunction that could only be removed if jouissance were to fill up the place of the signifier.¹¹ One can note, finally, that in the analytic discourse (as in the other three original discourses), one place—truth—has a special status. In the four discourses, you can start out from this place, but you cannot reach it, since the two arrows *move away* from it. This inaccessibility of truth in discourse does not mean that it does not exist. Truth exists. It speaks, but you cannot speak it. The capitalist discourse, on the other hand, is constructed in order to *miss* this inaccessibility of truth. Not only is the place of truth accessible, but it must also be passed through in order to reach knowledge. *Truth, in the capitalist discourse, has the same status as it does in astrology; it cannot be falsified.*

The capacity of the mathemes to generate such readings and consequences may be surprising, and this is especially true of the capitalist discourse, which seems a bit cobbled together. Lacan himself emphasized that these mathemes only “imitated mathematics, and he sought later, in topology, to find a means of judging that is not subjected to the caprices of language; it is nevertheless true that the choice of a (mathematized) writing is, in itself, a choice in favor of science.¹² Writing, with its terms, its signs, its punctuation, its rules for placement in space, imposes orientations and leads to conclusions that limit, a priori, the skidding of the signifier, on the condition that one resists any instrumentalization—which would finally be magical—of writing. It is therefore false to say that psychoanalysis, as Popper claimed, is unfalsifiable (an objection that Freud had already perceived). If it creates a problem, it is by always being falsifiable, up to the point when it ends. Indeed, the end of analysis could be called the end of the jouissance that comes from falsifying it: will and determination then become the notch of desire, the indestructibility and discontinuity of which are not recognized. It would not be too extreme to say that the analytic discourse is constructed on the principle of the inaugural and irremediable loss of jouissance, and that the nostalgia for falsifiability is only the ghost of this loss. The capitalist discourse presents itself as a discourse that has no loss and no entropy.

In this discourse S_2 is the slave-servant, whose knowledge can be activated. The relation $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ (the diagonal arrow that goes from the bottom left to the top right) can be transposed onto the capitalist/worker couple, since what intervenes in production is the *savoir-faire* of the labor force: the highly variable degree of the worker's skill, which goes from the status of being semi-skilled to that of engineer.

If the S_1 does not possess knowledge, what gives it the capacity to command? The answer is financial power. The worker obeys and produces. S/he produces what Marx discovered the secret of: surplus-value. We know that for Marx, whom no one challenges on this point, capitalism is characterized by the fact that labor-power has become a commodity, just like wheat or iron. Thus, with capitalism, surplus-jouissance (*a*) takes the form of surplus-value. Surplus-jouissance also calls to mind Freud's *Lustgewinn*, the "yield of pleasure," and already in Freud, this yield makes up for the structural failure of jouissance, as is demonstrated by the fact that humor produces a *Lustgewinn*.¹³ *Mehrwert*, then, is the extra value produced by the salaried worker, throughout the working day, after having first reproduced the value or his/her labor-power. In order to reproduce her/his ability to work (education, food, lodging), a worker needs to create a value of, let's say, four daily hours of labor. If s/he works eight hours, however, the difference—eight minus four—constitutes the *Mehrwert*.

In this sense, capitalism precedes and conditions psychoanalysis by providing the means of shaping jouissance through value. This value is exchange-value, not the use-value that must be renounced in order to make the primitive accumulation of capital possible. Something makes our ears prick up here: it is the "surplus," the *Gewinn* (yield), rather than the *Lust* (pleasure). Lacan retroactively introduces into Marx's discovery of surplus-value the element that explains the capitalist discourse's efficiency. Without this substitution of surplus-jouissance for surplus-value, it is impossible to explain the gap between the "real" economy (which follows the principle of surplus-value) and the economy that functions through financial globalization. Surplus-value, indeed, only constitutes the motive force of the capitalist mode of production as long as it enables there to be jouissance; if it did not do so, no one would care about it.

Yet who gets off? A Marxist could retort that the proletariat sells his/her labor-power simply in order to survive: "eat to live rather than live to eat." "The jouissance that you're talking about," this Marxist might say, concerns the capitalist. This objection cannot simply be brushed off, for it comes from the real of the class struggle. However, the "cunning" of the capitalist discourse involves interesting the proletariat in jouissance, and in order to do so, it transforms the proletariat into a consumer, a capitalist subject: the $\$$ is in the place of the agent. Thus, money no longer serves as an instrument of measurement or as the general equivalent; instead, it is only valuable to the extent that it engenders itself or seems to engender itself, in a parthenogenesis that excludes the productive process.

Marx, according to Lacan, completed the capitalist discourse by giving it “its subject, the proletarian, thanks to whom the capitalist discourse is flourishing wherever the Marxist state-form prevails.”¹⁴ This rather daring judgment rectifies his assessment two years earlier, in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, that the Soviet system functioned through the discourse of the university: knowledge, taken as a unified whole, was its agent, and the “new man” was supposed to be produced.¹⁵ In my opinion, this judgment is correct, but the later collapse of this system gives support to the later thesis. Concerning this collapse, it would be comic, but fair, to argue that with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the capitalist discourse experienced its first real defeat. Why not say that the Soviet system was the supreme stage of capitalism, for its axiom did not call the functioning of the capitalist discourse into question? The extortion of surplus-value did not stop. It was distributed differently, and apparently—or, in any case, according to the ideology— S_1 and S_2 , the capitalist and the worker, were no longer in an antagonistic relation: the former tried to get people to work too much, and the latter to diminish the amount of labor. Otherwise, the slogan, “we are all capitalists” sapped the Soviet system like the “old mole.” Since the system was never able to acknowledge that this was its slogan, *jouissance* tended to get a lot of bad publicity; the proletarians had to renounce it in order to have a better future, while the bureaucracy transformed itself into a bureaucracy of *jouissance*.

In all this, there are strategies for obtaining *jouissance*. What differentiates them is how one conceives of two couples within the discourse: with $\$ - S_2$, we have the proletarian whose desire gives in to surplus-*jouissance* (work more to get off more)¹⁶ and the worker as producer (work less in order to be less exploited); the other couple is $\$ - S_1$, since the capitalist is also sundered [*scindé*] between the one who recuperates surplus-value and commands the process, and the one who, as subject, consumes.¹⁷ Once this relation has been established, it cannot be revoked. The worker (in S_2) can go on strike, but the capitalist, in S_1 , cannot. The capitalist philanthropist or patron will never go so far as to indict the capitalist discourse itself. On the other hand, the capitalist can put him/herself in the ascetic position of subject, without thereby modifying the process. If the proletarian withdraws, as far as possible, from the position of subject of consumption, this will not have much of an effect. It is obvious, finally, that within the framework of the capitalist discourse, the proletarian’s increase in consumption, which involves going against the grain of the capitalist mode of production, never dries up the production of wealth.

From this, one must conclude that only the strike, a work stoppage, can constitute the symptom. One must also conclude that highlighting the contradiction between S_1 and S_2 reveals not a splitting but a sundering.

Since this is the case, finding the key to this discourse implies recognizing that the necessity of surplus-*jouissance* is founded on the status of *jouissance* as a “hole that must be filled” (“Radiophonie,” 434).

Marx fills this hole through surplus-value. This is why Lacan says that *Mehrwert* [surplus-value] is the *Marxlust*, Marx's surplus-jouissance. Surplus-value is the cause of desire, which the capitalist economy makes into its very principle, that of extensive production. Now, if capitalist production—the cycle M-C-M (Money—Commodity—Money + Money)—implies that consumption is always increasing, then this production would come to a sudden stop if it actually led to a consumption that could procure jouissance; consumption would then be halted, production would slow down, and this cycle would end. If this is not the case, it is because this economy, through a *reversal* that Marx had not foreseen, produces a lack-of-jouissance [*manque-à-jouir*]. *The more I consume, the greater the gap between jouissance and consumption becomes*. Thus there is a struggle involving the distribution of this surplus-value, which “only induces those who are exploited to act as rivals on principle, in order to shelter their obvious participation in the thirst of the lack-of-jouissance” (“*Radiophonie*,” 435). Pareto, one of the theorists of neoclassical economics, forged an exquisite expression: the “ophelimity” of a glass of water. On the basis of an incontestable observation—that a drinker takes less pleasure in a third glass of water than from the first—Pareto deduces a law: the value of the water decreases in proportion to its consumption. The opposite law, however, governs the capitalist economy. Beyond drinking without thirst, this law can be stated as follows: “The more I drink, the thirstier I get.”

The Choreography of Love

As we have just seen, in the capitalist discourse, the accessibility of truth is combined with the disjunction between the places of truth and the production (on the bottom left and right). This suppression exonerates the capitalist discourse from a requirement that was believed to constitute all discourses.

The other structural characteristic that we have examined is the creation of an arrow, $a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$, which does not exist in the discourse of the master, from which the capitalist discourse derives. This arrow is also not found in the discourse of the hysteric, and although it does appear in the discourse of the analyst, it is marked explicitly by an impossibility. Only in the discourse of the university, which has a special kinship with the capitalist discourse, does this arrow function.

Within this framework, we can now approach another aspect of the capitalist discourse. As Lacan stated on January 6, 1972, in *Le savoir du psychanalyste* [The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst]: “What distinguishes the discourse of capitalism is this — the *Verwerfung*, the rejection, the throwing outside all the symbolic fields... of what? Of castration. Every order, every discourse that has capitalism in common sets aside what we shall call simply the matters [*choses*] of love. It's for this that, two centuries after this sliding [*glissement*], let's call it Calvinist—why not?—castration has finally stormed back in, in the form of the analytic discourse” (*Je parle aux murs*, 96).

The heart of this statement is its connection between the setting aside of “matters of love” and the foreclosure of castration; before we approach it directly, a few remarks can place it in perspective.

First, according to Lacan, love is what makes up for the nonexistence of the sexual relation (whereas the mere addition of man + woman would give one access to a *jouissance* that is primary and absolute). There is no sexual relation because of castration, and the acceptance of this nonexistence can authorize a contingent sexual encounter.¹⁸ The foreclosure of castration, on the contrary, has a very different consequence: it makes the sexual relation possible (which can then be indicated by the arrow, $a \rightarrow S$, which can be read as “a woman fulfills a man”). In consequence, love, as something that makes up for this impossibility, becomes obsolete. The mechanics of sex would then become the physics of love, and there would be no need to differentiate sex and love; a manual of sexology would be the same as the map of *Tendre*.¹⁹

What is more subtle and difficult is an equivalence that Lacan posits in “*L’étourdit*,” a text from the same year (1972): “Death [*la mort*] is love [*l’amour*].” This reminds us, of the romance of Iseut and Tristan, in which death does indeed signal love. Either there is love or there is death. Or again, if love, which makes up for the nonexistence of the sexual relation, is an inaccessible outcome, death will do quite nicely; only it will have the power to make up for the situation in which castration has left us. Let us note, to strengthen this reading, that Lacan attributes this equivalence between love and death to Freud. What appears more directly in Freud’s work, however, is the equivalence between death and *jouissance*. This has an intrusive effect of double exposure. If, for Freud, *jouissance* is impossible for the living being, and is always lost (whatever the status of primary *jouissance* may be), the sole virtue of love, as distinct from desire, is that it brings with it the promise of a substitute that overcomes this loss. Its narcissistic structure lends itself to this, including in its lethal foundation, since anyone can get bogged down in seeking this specularly of love.

As for the other term involved, the foreclosure of castration is distinct from that of the Name-of-the-Father, the expression upon which Lacan had based the distinction between psychosis and neurosis. He uses the arrow, $a \rightarrow$ to indicate a subject that is completed by its surplus-*jouissance*, in an asymptotic countability. At the limit of this countability, we can hope to have an unbarred subject: the “new man,” who will soon be joined by the most precious capital, woman. What must be seen, indeed, is that the cycle Money-Commodity-more Money, which Marx had so impeccably taken apart, is homologous to the Easter computus; by virtue of money, capitalism *virtualizes all living things through coining*. In such an economy, even the cost of death would serve for something, and, in contrast to Freud’s interpretation, the world would be loveless, with the exception of a religious love for that highly abstract Other, the capitalist system.

What is in question here is the status of death. On the side of psychoanalysis, this is the for-nothing that makes it equivalent to the for-nothing of love, thwarting any full counting of the real (what would it cost to buy the universe and who would want to buy it?). On the side of capitalism, death would be transformed into a substance through its commodification, founded on an unlimited linguistic virtualization; the real would be equal to reality and the sexual relation would be necessary as the law by which the world works. This world would be nothing more than the reflection of the sexual relation.

As a result, when Lacan speaks of how castration storms back in through the analytic discourse, we should take him at his word: castration, as revealing the absence of the sexual relation, only becomes *for itself* with Freud. It had already been indicated, more or less, through the Oedipus complex, which was not, however, enough to permit the *Bejahung* (the yes to....) of castration, even if this consent is already present with language.

With the coming of capitalism, everything concerning the action of castration is foreclosed from discourse, starting with “matters of love”: this could cause difficulty for the Oedipus complex itself. To mention sexual criminality, which, in changing forms, has always constituted *something of* the scandal of mores, there are two ways of struggling against it: reintroducing castration or transforming the Oedipus complex into law. The effectiveness of the second solution is limited; only an acceptance of castration can enable the subject to accept such a law. In counting on law, one ends up forging a pseudo-castration, which would be complete and total. This pseudo-castration would only feed the misunderstanding of sexual difference, since it would reduce the feminine to a binary negative term in relation to the masculine. The foreclosure of castration does not mean the manufacturing of psychotics, for it also concerns neurotics, pushing *both of them* to seek in power—either as masters or as those who benefit from the latter’s trusts or entailments—a way to keep castration foreclosed. Can the hysteric and the obsessional neurotic be said to foreclose castration? Freud, in his case history of the Wolf Man, threw light on the foreclosure of castration in a way that can accommodate neurosis.²⁰ This suggests that castration cannot be brought wholly and totally into the field of the symbolic. The capitalist discourse transforms this partial restriction into a general rule. It must be insisted that a misunderstanding of castration is a structural, and not an accidental, part of the castration complex. Such a misinterpretation is inevitable when femininity is not apprehended as being *beyond* castration. Being beyond it means that castration is necessary, but not sufficient.

Now let us examine the context. Lacan mentions a poem by Paul Fort: “If all the girls in the world wanted to join hands, all around the sea, they could make a round.”²¹ Lacan does not content himself with pointing out that the “girls” themselves never dreamed of this. Unlike boys, they do not need to make a circle: a circle, for example, of officers or even a Freudian circle. Boys go around in circles because they are afraid of finding themselves alone with one girl. For this reason, it is up to the girl to separate the boy from his circle, from his “*Masse*.” Nothing is

missing from this choreography of love, not even the fact that before she succeeds in taking a boy out of his circle, a girl goes together with another girl, whom she will then leave on the sidelines, as soon as she has accomplished her abduction, when she will have kidnapped a boy.

If girls tend to go “two by two,” this has its foundation in what Lacan, in his “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality,” refers to as a *jouissance* that is “enveloped in its own contiguity.”²² In this respect, feminine homosexuality could be particularized as a relation of Other to Other, and not of same to same. This is the case with the relation between Lol V. Stein and Tatiana, in Marguerite Duras’ novel, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*.²³ How are these “matters of love,” when they are approached from the feminine side?

First of all, there is a gap between it and Freud’s conception of Eros, as it is found especially in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: “Eros and Ananke [Love and Necessity] have become the parents of human civilization too. The first result of civilization was that even a fairly large number of people were now able to live together in a community.”²⁴ Here, Eros proceeds by means of *Vereinigung*, to make it one that we know well: unification. It contributes to civilization, by constituting circles that become larger and larger, going from the clan to humanity.

In Freud’s words:

Since civilization obeys an internal erotic impulsion which causes human beings to unite in a closely-knit group, it can only achieve this aim through an ever-increasing reinforcement of the sense of guilt. What began in relation to the father is completed in relation to the group. If civilization is a necessary course of development from the family to humanity as a whole, then—as a result of...the eternal struggle between the trends of love and death—there is inextricably bound up with it an increase in the sense of guilt (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 133).

According to Lacan, love does the opposite: it dissolves the circle by removing an element from it. He thus envisions “matters of love” as a *disunification*, and situates love more on the side of Thanatos than of Eros. The mythography of Eros is not at all unilateral.

Claude Lévi-Strauss deserves recognition for having emphasized the positive character of the Oedipal prohibition in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*: “If these modalities can be subsumed under the general term of exogamy...this is conditional upon the apperception, behind the superficially negative expression of the rule of exogamy, of the final principle which, through the prohibition of marriage within prohibited degrees, tends to ensure the total and continuous circulation of the group’s most important assets, its wives and its daughters.”²⁵ However, Lévi-Strauss thereby covers over matters of love in his own way. He reduces women to values or goods and neglects exoandry, in which men leave their group and join their wives’

group. This kinship structure should take priority, as soon as women are considered as subjects, rather than as goods.

The feminine requirement of a minus-one (which may serve as the basis of its monandry) and of an “*Homoinzun*”²⁶ who will be her own, rather than being a boy from the regiment, is not symmetrical with masculine exogamy. We will understand this distinction better if we remember that in order to bear leaving the circle, a man needs to transform a woman—the one who has chosen him—into *woman*, quite simply by locating the Name-of-the-Father in her. This is a law: in order for a man—in this case, a neurotic man—to be able to attach himself to a woman, he must discern a paternal signifier in her. This is how he deals with the trauma of the encounter with the Other sex.²⁷ In psychosis, this transformation of a woman into *woman* cannot be effected through the Name-of-the-Father as operator and therefore implies that man himself must become Woman, “the woman that men are missing,” without whom, let us add, they are doomed to remain in the circle (which the psychotic will not fail to denounce) (“On a Question,” 472). For a woman, it should be emphasized that she awakens the man by separating him from the group. This dissymmetry between masculine exogamy and a woman’s choice of a man is a part of the dissymmetry between what is generally attributed to man—the fantasy of the *Vereinigung*—and what a woman reveals: love as an election, which implies a dissolution.

We know the extent to which, for Freud, the question of understanding femininity was both decisive and insoluble. He considered anatomical and psychological determinations to be insufficient and concluded with an observation that—although it does not give us a positive definition of what a woman is—does provide a differential assessment: a woman differs from a man because she is not a woman from the moment of her birth, but becomes one. Man as *being* is opposed to woman as *becoming*. This is Freud’s final lesson. Why did Freud, who had written about the choice of love-objects, not try to define women through their mode of choosing them? In any case, this is what Lacan did.

It can even be claimed that, in the sexuation table in *Encore*, Lacan provides a matheme for this mode of choice: the wall—erected by language—between the sexes can be crossed over from left to right—from the phallic side to the side that is not-whole—by following an arrow: $S \rightarrow a$ (*Encore*, 78). Lacan’s comments on this arrow leave us in no doubt about how he schematizes men’s choice of a love-object: “He is unable to attain his sexual partner, who is the Other, except inasmuch as his partner is the cause of his desire” (*Encore*, 80). After this, if we had the idea—and may God protect us from this—that there is a symmetry between the sexes (which would suppress their differences) we would expect a woman’s love-choice to be written as $a \rightarrow S$; this could be the matheme for the masculine cliché of woman as seducer. This is not at all, however, what Lacan writes. Through her choice of sexual partner, a woman inscribes herself in the phallic function: *The Woman* $\rightarrow \Phi$. Yet, on the other hand, she has a relation with the Other, not through the intermediary of the *a*, but as radically barred. It does not seem risky to me to read the arrow,

The Woman→S(A) as indicating the feminine choice in love: it dissolves the set by extracting an element from it. Beyond this, it should be noted that the capitalist discourse introduces the arrow, $a \rightarrow S$, in terms of the possible, as if the movement went from the not-whole to castration, and as if we could read it as a sketch of a supermarket of love and desire, offered up for the subject's consumption. Thus the capitalist discourse forecloses castration and, when all is said and done, also calls sexual difference into question. The capitalist discourse is Jungian.

This consideration opens up a path for assessing how this setting matters of love aside can be related to castration in the capitalist discourse. Lacan, in his "Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality," recognizes the anti-entropic effects of feminine homosexuality, as they can be observed, for example, in the *Précieuses*. He also notes in passing that the *Précieuses* differed from the Cathars, who in sundering good absolutely from evil, anticipated the capitalist paradise, or—and this may be the same thing—fueled a millenarianism, the effects of which are not always cheering.

Among the *Précieuses*, who organized themselves in salons at the beginning of the seventeenth century, there is no doubt that women took the initiative in choosing a love-object. According to the classical analyses, such as Paul Bénichou's, men who were admitted into the salon had been taken from the group of knights.²⁸ This is a fair, if cavalier view. Knights were gradually disappearing, thanks in part to the *Précieuses* (and had, of course, been given their deathblow by Cervantes, who had mocked the knight errant's desire to preserve chivalry singlehandedly). In the salon, such knights were taught how to speak, rather than to kill or rape. It may well have been this "borrowing" of men to which Molière objected, but this does not discredit the mode of choosing love-objects that the *Précieuses* promoted. They are a perfect example of the civilizing work of women, which Freud had glimpsed: the dissolving of the group of men and the constructing of a community that acted through *dissemination*.

The Amazons, the other example that comes to mind, raise thornier questions. They are known through Greek mythology, beginning with Homer. Historians have said less about them, since they do not know who their historical prototypes were, or even whether they existed. One journalist-historian, Lyn Webster Wilde, in *On the Trail of the Women Warriors*, hypothesizes that they had been displaced from the southern to the northern edge of the Black Sea and beyond, towards Ukraine, where numerous tombs of female warriors have been found.²⁹ In this connection, I find it interesting that the oldest tomb (around 1200) of a female warrior to have been discovered was in Colchis, in present-day Georgia, the home of Medea. The latter was accused of killing her two sons, just as certain Greek authors had accused the Amazons of infanticide. Whether or not this is the case, there is one constant in this mytheme: the women chose the men whom they have defeated in battle, after which there was a celebration, the Feast of Roses, where each woman married the man whom she had conquered. The best-known of the Amazons is Penthesilia,

their queen, who fell in love with Achilles at the siege of Troy, and would have done anything to defeat him and take him away from the circle of the Greeks. If, according, of course, to ancient Greek authors, this circle represented the progress of civilization, then it is interesting that it was a barbarian who introduced matters of love into civilization. This is the paradox in which Thanatos civilizes Eros, which Giorgio Agamben seeks to account for in his stimulating work, *Homo sacer*. In the myth, it is Penthesilia who is defeated and dies; Achilles, defeated in his turn by his love for her, embraces her, a rather sensational case of male necrophilia.

Heinrich von Kleist's play, *Penthesilia*, reverses this situation by having Penthesilia kill Achilles. Once he is dead, she eats him raw, having the honesty to do so herself, instead of giving this task to her dogs, as Artemis had done with Actaeon.

How many a maid will say, her arms wrapped round
 Her lover's neck: I love you, oh so much
 That if I could, I'd eat you up right here;
 And later, taken by her word, the fool!
 She's had enough and now she's sick of him.
 You see, my love, that never was my way.
 Look: when *my* arms were wrapped around your neck,
 I did what I had spoken, word for word:
 I was not quite so mad as it might seem.³⁰

In such a context, it can be said that "A kiss, a bite,/The two should rhyme" (Kleist, 145).

The radical character of these actions provides a luminous insight into the mysterious cannibalistic primary identification ("Medusa's Head," 103). These women, in the throes of disgust, and whom Penthesilia judges correctly to be mad, are not exempt from a condition that we find in bulimia: bulimics eat the father again and again, because they have not dared really to eat him, as Penthesilia does. We know that in psychosis this "remake" of primary identification can take the form of psychotic ingestion.

A moment ago, I mentioned Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, which is as important a reference now as Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* was in the 1960s. This book discovers a logical paradox that can only be solved topologically.

Homo Sacer refers to a very specific Roman law, which Agamben found formulated in Festus:

The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that "if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide." This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred.³¹

Agamben thus brings out a contradiction: death is a judicial punishment on the condition that it not take the form of a judicial punishment. Now, to understand the logic at work here in as simple a way as possible: an element is subtracted from a set in such a way that it becomes impossible to reintegrate it into any set at all. This logic is the same as what presides over a woman's amorous choice of a man. Once Achilles has been chosen by Penthesilia, he can no longer be the Greek whom he had once been.³²

Notes

1. This is a translation of the chapter entitled "*La dérogation capitaliste*" from Pierre Bruno, *Lacan, passeur de Marx: l'invention du symptôme* (Toulouse: Érès, 2010) 201–224.
2. This uses the schema of discourse from "Television" which differs from the writing of the discourses found in "Radiophonie" in the use of the crossed arrows. The specific matheme of the capitalist discourse can be found in *Lacan in Italia*. See Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. by Joan Copjec, trans. by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson (New York: Norton, 1990) 13, Jacques Lacan, "Radiophonie," in *Autres écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001) 403–447, and Jacques Lacan, "Du discours psychanalytique," in *Lacan in Italia 1953 - 1978* (Milan: La Salamandra, 1978) 40.
3. The definitive form of this thesis may perhaps be found in Lacan's Caracas seminar of August 1980: "What language can do best is to prove itself to be in the service of the death instinct." See Nicolas Francion, *Almanach de la dissolution*, (Paris: Navarin/Seuil, 1986).
4. Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2006) 498.
5. Jean-Claude Maleval, "*Elements pour une appréhension clinique de la psychose ordinaire*," janvier 2003. Retrieved from <http://w3.erc.univ-tlse2.fr/pdf/elements_psychose_ordinaire.pdf>.
6. Orwell, who worked as part of the British secret services after spending the Spanish Civil War in the International Brigades, was not unambiguous in terms of his choice of camp.
7. "This touches on the fact that meaning [*sens*] is never produced except through the translation from one discourse to another." Jacques Lacan, "L'étourdit," in *Autres écrits*, 480.
8. [See Pierre Bruno's analysis of Bertolt Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* in *Lacan, passeur de Marx*, 85–98 (Translator's note).]
9. [In France, pharmacists still have a role in suggesting medications to their customers (Translator's note).]
10. In his book, *Comment taire le sujet* [How to Silence the Subject], Serge Lesourd emphasizes the rising diagonal of $a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$ and relates it to the matheme for perversion, thus connecting capitalism with the epiphany of a subject who is "capable of experiencing jouissance without any constraints." Without discussing directly this identification of the two mathemes, I would note that in the matheme of perversion, the \diamond of alienation/separation is placed between a and \mathcal{S} , rather than an arrow that is oriented in a single direction. It

should also be recalled that, according to Lacan, perversion involves a logical protest that goes against normalizing identifications. See Lesourd, Serge, *Comment taire le sujet ? : des discours aux parlottes libérales*. (Toulouse: Érès, 2006) and Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation, 1958-1959*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: La Martinière, 2013) 569. I thank Marie-Jean Sauret for pointing out this passage to me.

11. In this respect, moreover, the discourse of the master, as the discourse of the unconscious, shows us the impossibility of commanding knowledge, while the analytic discourse works to “grip this [impossible] real.”
12. This writing can, moreover, be independent of any transcription of the spoken word, as can be seen in the use of the little arrows in quantum physics. See Richard Feynman, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
13. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), XXI (1960): “Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,” 28.
14. Jacques Lacan, *Je parle aux murs: entretiens de la chapelle de Sainte-Anne*, ed. by Jacques-Alain (Paris: Seuil, 2011) 96.
15. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007) 206.
16. [This is a play on Nicolas Sarkozy’s campaign slogan during the presidential campaign of 2007: “Work more to earn more” (Translator’s note).]
17. [For a discussion of “sundering,” see Pierre Bruno’s article, “Hyde and Seek,” in this issue of S (Translator’s note).]
18. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998) 145. In further references, this text will be cited as *Encore*.
19. Jacques Lacan, “The Freudian Thing,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 339.
20. Marie-Jean Sauret, *Malaise dans le capitalisme* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2009) 171–213. I am, of course, not unaware that certain analysts consider the Wolf Man to be psychotic.
21. Paul Fort, “The Round,” in *Jardin illustré de fables et de poésies: Édition bilingue français/anglais*, trans. by Jean-Pierre Lefeuvre (Paris: Publibook, 2011) 141.
22. Jacques Lacan, “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality” in *Écrits: The First Complete Translation in English*, 619.
23. Marguerite Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, trans. by Richard Seaver (New York: Pantheon, 1986). Lacan’s reading of this work can be found in “Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras du ravissement de Lol V. Stein,” in *Autres écrits*.
24. Sigmund Freud, XXI (1961): “Civilization and Its Discontents,” 97.
25. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, ed. by Rodney Needham, trans. by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 479.

26. “*Hommoinzun*” is a play on “*au moins un* [at least one],” which introduces a reference to *Homme*, man.
27. In “Medusa’s Head,” Freud describes what he calls the “apotropaic” function: an image of castration, as terrifying as it may be, is better than the unthinkable confrontation with a hole that has no boundaries, which would be an absolute absence. See Sigmund Freud, XVIII (1955): “Medusa’s Head,” 274.
28. Paul Bénichou, *Morales du Grand siècle*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).
29. Lyn Webster Wilde, *On the Trail of the Women Warriors: The Amazons in Myth and History*, (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2000).
30. Heinrich von Kleist, *Penthesilea: A Tragic Drama*, trans. by Joel Agee (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000) 146.
31. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 71.
32. In psychoanalysis, there is the example of an element that serves as exception to the set: this is the real father, who as agent of castration, re-imposes the primacy of the living being over language.