

JOHN HOLLAND

EDITORIAL

Capitalism and Psychoanalysis

In an unpublished article written for the French newspaper *Le Monde* on the heels of the events of May 1968, Jacques Lacan noted that the abundance of objects offered to us by consumer society does “not fill up [*remplissent*] the fateful object *a*.” In these words, we already begin to identify the difficulty that capitalism poses, not only to each of us in the most intimate aspects of our everyday lives, but also to psychoanalysis as such. The questions raised by the effects of capitalism are both clinical and theoretical, for they involve the subject. Any discussion that psychoanalysis provides about this mode of production will entail a re-examination and rethinking of its own basic concepts.

D'un Autre à l'autre [From an Other to the other], the seminar that is most closely bound up with May 1968, contains one of the most important fruits of Lacan's engagement with Marxism: the definition of the object *a* as a surplus-jouissance, a term that is homologous with surplus-value; this jouissance is brought into existence through a process that is closely related to Karl Marx's account of the production of this value. Then, with the advent of the theory of discourse, another question arose for Lacan: where is capitalism to be located in the four discourses? After a certain time of hesitation, he stated that it is not to be conflated with the discourse of the master, but constitutes a fifth discourse, the structure of which he wrote only once, in his Milan lecture, “*Du discours psychanalytique* [On the Psychoanalytic Discourse]”:

$$\downarrow \frac{S}{S_1} \quad \times \quad \frac{S_2}{a} \quad \downarrow$$

This writing was preceded, four months earlier, in one of a series of lectures given to the interns of the Hôpital de Sainte-Anne, under the collective title *Le savoir du psychanalyste* [The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst], by a characterization of this discourse that is as important as it is cryptic: “What distinguishes the discourse of capitalism is this: the *Verwerfung*, the rejection, the throwing outside all the symbolic fields...of what? Of castration.”¹

Lacan's definition of this discourse raises, in a very urgent way, the question of what capitalism is for psychoanalysis. According to his definition, the fundamental characteristic of capitalism, as a discourse, is a particular psychic operation: the foreclosure of castration. Lacan does not, in any direct way, connect this foreclosure with the definition of capitalism as a mode of production. The question of how the two would be "related" is an urgent one. Perhaps, however, as with most urgent questions, we should not try to provide an answer too quickly; an immediate understanding could well miss what is most important.

Each of the six articles in this issue on capitalism and psychoanalysis seeks to arrive at certain answers concerning the relation—or non-relation—between the two. Their responses are diverse, and readers, quite fortunately, will find more than one divergence between the authors. One quality that all the authors share is a negative one: they do not approach psychoanalysis as a grid of knowledge, which could then be superimposed upon capitalism in order to produce an analysis. In other words, their aim is not to provide an "applied psychoanalysis," as this term is commonly understood; they are doing something else. Perhaps François Regnault throws some light on the nature of their projects in his discussion of a different "relation": the one between psychoanalysis and literature. As he reminds us, this general understanding of applied psychoanalysis was not Lacan's own; in his *écrit* on André Gide, Lacan says that "Psychoanalysis is applied, strictly speaking, only as a treatment and thus to a subject who speaks and hears."² As Regnault states, neither Freud nor Lacan "appl[ies] his theoretical views to literature." Instead, both of these analysts approach it in order to "bring...analytical theory one step forward"; their artistic and literary analyses are forms of theoretical psychoanalysis.³ In approaching capitalism through psychoanalysis, the authors of the following articles are doing something similar; they too are practicing theoretical psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis can only examine capitalism by redefining, extending and diverting its own concepts onto new and different paths.

The first of the articles in this issue is Jacques Lacan's "On a Reform in Its Hole [*D'une réforme dans son trou*]," and it appears here in English translation for the first time; it is the text that was rejected by *Le Monde*, and it was never published during his lifetime. Written in February 1969 to comment on reforms for the teaching of psychiatry that had been proposed in the wake of May 1968, it also offers a much wider-ranging analysis. Drawing upon the concepts that he had been developing in *D'un Autre à l'autre*, he pushes them forward by analyzing the relations between the object *a* and castration, as they were being played out within the climate of social crisis that had been occasioned by the ceaseless expansion of capitalism. Lacan depicts the uprising as a "maelstrom," one that arose, in part, as a response to the triumph of the capitalist conception of knowledge within the French university.

Samo Tomšič's "Laughter and Capitalism" elaborates some of the consequences of the homology between surplus-jouissance and surplus-value. One of these is that the unconscious becomes what Lacan, in "Television," calls the "ideal worker"; it is a part of a system of psychic production that is structured in the same way as

the capitalist mode of production.⁴ In this context, the joke takes on a particularly interesting status. On the one hand, it is accomplished through an economization that has its clear counterpart in capitalist practices and it produces a “yield of pleasure [*Lustgewinn*]” that corresponds to surplus-jouissance. On the other hand, certain of its aspects can be dangerous to capitalism, as a tantalizing statement of Lacan’s, again from “Television,” suggests: “The more saints, the more laughter; that’s my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse—which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some” (16). Following this indication, among others, Tomšič shows how psychoanalysis and the critique of political economy find common ground in the field of comedy, rather than tragedy, and locates a possible subversion of capitalism in the procedures of skeptical jokes.

Marie-Jean Sauret’s article, “Psychopathology and Fractures of the Social Bond” which is an excerpt from his book, *Malaise dans le capitalisme* [Capitalism and Its Discontents], approaches capitalism by examining the concepts of discourse and the “social bond [*lien social*].⁵ The basis of Lacan’s discourses is precisely what Emile Durkheim had expelled in order to establish the “scientific” character of sociology. Sociology studies a “society” from which the most intimate aspects of our singularity have been excluded, whereas discourse is the structure in which each of us tries to inscribe this singularity in a connection with others. The four discourses present four different types of social bond, but the fifth, capitalist discourse, is far more problematic. First, Sauret shows that one of its particularities is its circularity; unlike the others, which have stopping-points that can allow us to change to another discourse, it is characterized by a potentially endless movement. It is also the discourse that is the most difficult for us to lodge our singularity in, and this difficulty often veers into impossibility; one of the clinical consequences of this is the increase in the number of suicides.

The two texts by Pierre Bruno are taken from his book, *Lacan, passeur de Marx: l’invention du symptôme* [Lacan, Marx’s *Passeur*: The Invention of the Symptom] and examine other aspects of this discourse.⁶ The first, “The Capitalist Exemption,” discusses a number of its effects, including one on sexuation: if the impossibility of the sexual relation is based on castration, then the result of the latter’s foreclosure is to render this relation possible. This is a surprising conclusion, and if we are to understand its implications, we must deepen our understanding of what castration is and what it involves; the task of analyzing “capitalism” thus leads us again to re-examine basic psychoanalytic concepts. Bruno begins this task by discussing the relations between castration and love.

In Bruno’s second text, “Hyde and Seek,” he discusses the status of the unconscious and the drives under capitalism and argues that the latter tries to cut the two entirely from one another, so that they will not communicate at all. In order to characterize this radical operation, he endows the French verb, “*scinder*”—translated here as “sunder”—with a new meaning; it marks out this radical new disconnection. According to him, the first literary text to have carried out this severance is Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which thereby founded

a modern myth. In this work, Hyde is not at all Jekyll's unconscious; instead, Jekyll himself stands in S_2 , the place of the unconscious, and Hyde inhabits \mathcal{S} , that of the drives.

Finally, my article, "The Capitalist Uncanny," returns to the question of the status of the unconscious in the capitalist discourse, to which it provides a somewhat different approach. It examines the transformations of Lacan's formula, "the signifier represents the subject for another signifier," a formula that indicates one important way in which the unconscious can manifest itself. This formula became the basis for the discourse of the master, before being disrupted by the capitalist discourse, with its reversal of the places of S_1 and \mathcal{S} . This inversion, in turn, has dramatic effects: the signifier no longer represents the subject, and knowledge no longer exists in relation to the supposition of this subject. As a result, this knowledge loses its unconscious resonance and can come to be colonized by the calculations of *homo oeconomicus*. The final consequence of these structural changes is the eruption of a new form of the uncanny, one that makes of "capitalism" a particular mode of the compulsion to repeat.

In the current conjuncture, a time when both psychoanalysis and capitalism are in crisis, the more pessimistic among us may well wonder both whether the former is able to respond to the problems that the latter causes and whether it can provide answers that will still be relevant to the contemporary "world." The ambition of these texts, which explore their relations, is to help psychoanalysis to continue and to develop.

I would like to thank Patrick Valas, to whom Lacan gave the typescript of "*D'une réforme dans son trou*," for making it available to everyone on his internet site, and for encouraging me in my project of translating it. I would also like to thank Marie-Jean Sauret and Pierre Bruno, along with their respective publishers—the Presses Universitaires du Midi and Éditions érès—for their permission to translate and publish their texts. Many thanks also go to Samo Tomšič for submitting his excellent article for this issue. Finally, I am very grateful to Sigi Jöttkandt and Dominiek Hoens for inviting me to be a guest editor and for their invaluable advice and help.

Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, *Je parle aux murs: entretiens de la chapelle de Sainte-Anne*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2011) 96.
2. Jacques Lacan, "The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2006) 630.
3. François Regnault, "Lacan and Experience," in *Lacan and the Human Sciences*, ed. by Alexandre Leupin, trans. by Thelma Sowley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) 55.

4. Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. by Joan Copjec, trans. by Denis Hollier et al. (New York: Norton, 1990) 14.
5. Marie-Jean Sauret, *Malaise dans le capitalisme, Psychanalyse & series* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2009).
6. Pierre Bruno, *Lacan, passeur de Marx: l'invention du symptôme* (Toulouse: Érès, 2010).