

SAMO TOMŠIČ

HOMOLOGY: MARX AND LACAN

1. From Saussure to Marx

In my paper I would like to focus on the shift in Lacan's teaching after 1968, when he introduces his reference to Marx. I will limit myself only to this shift, in order to show why Marx should be understood as more than mere "occasional" reference in Lacan's teaching. I could, of course, trace this reference back to the very beginnings of this teaching, but I will confine myself to *Seminar XVI* (1968-69), since it is here that Lacan elaborates the connection between Marx's critique of political economy and Freud's discovery of the unconscious for the first time in a more systematic way, and in close reference to what then appears as the deadlocks of classical structuralism. Lacan introduces his reference to Marx as follows: "I will proceed with a homological outlook based on Marx in order to introduce today the place where we need to situate the essential function of object *a*."¹ I would like to specifically focus on this notion of homology for two main reasons: First, because this is how Lacan subsequently describes the relation between surplus value, and surplus jouissance; and second, because the term homology, the emphasis on the shared logic in the Freudian and the Marxian field, exemplifies the specificity of Lacan's approach in difference to other attempts to link, in one way or another, psychoanalysis with Marxism.

Regarding the first point I can immediately mention that the notion of surplus jouissance is not something Lacan would simply pull out of his hat. The term is of course coined according to *Mehrwert*, surplus value, and Lacan even proposes a German version, *Mehrlust*. But this connection of jouissance and surplus exists already in Freud. In his book on jokes, Freud articulated his analysis of the mechanism of satisfaction around the notion of *Lustgewinn*, gain in pleasure, or simply pleasure-profit.² This connection of pleasure with surplus already indicates the direction that will push Freud's theoretical development towards what he will later call "beyond the pleasure principle." To keep it brief we can say that as soon as pleasure is marked by a certain surplus, it is no longer what we would spontaneously understand under pleasure, i.e. the bodily feeling accompanying the decrease of tension,

as in the case of satisfaction of hunger or thirst. On the contrary, pleasure beyond the pleasure principle, or pleasure-profit, is no longer something that simply accompanies the decrease of tension, but something that is *produced* in its increase. A by-product, then, that Freud articulates with two objects of his early analysis, unconscious desire (in *Interpretation of Dreams*) and drive (in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*). And what is striking in Freud is that he links the reaching of satisfaction of unconscious desire, and later of drive, with labour: *Traumarbeit*, dream-work, *Witzarbeit*, joke-work etc. In this process of unconscious labour he discovers that the satisfaction deviates from the content of unconscious formations and clings onto its form. Postulating *Lust*, pleasure—a term that Lacan will for good reasons translate as *jouissance*—as profit therefore already sets the terrain for Lacan's reading of Freud through Marx. If *jouissance* is produced, and produced as surplus, as a possible source of profit, then the unconscious seems to bear the same structure as the capitalist mode of production; but also the other way around, the capitalist structure is inscribed in the unconscious, so that we can discern a thesis here: "Capitalism is unconscious." This thesis, too, can already be found formulated in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, in a crucial passage where he compares the unconscious desire with the role of the capitalist in the social organisation of production processes.³

When Lacan later starts speaking of capitalist discourse he strengthens the homological link between Freud and Marx, since saying "the capitalist discourse" means as much as saying "the capitalist mode of production." Given the Freudian focus on the *productive* aspect of the unconscious, and given the Lacanian re-elaboration of this productive dimension, I would say that psychoanalysis started with the discovery not of just any unconscious, but precisely of the *capitalist* unconscious, or more generally with the discovery of the "ex-sistence of unconscious to discourse," as Lacan will repeatedly claim in his later teaching. This is, for instance, where Freud's discovery has nothing in common with the Jungian subconsciousness, or with philosophical ideas of the unconscious.⁴ We can find the confirmation of this "ex-sistence" all over Freud's work: the connection between capitalism and the emergence of traumatic neurosis; the central role of capitalist instability in the determination of cultural discontent (discontent in culture precisely *is* discontent in capitalism) and, as already mentioned, the explicit comparison of unconscious desire with the capitalist. Lacan's introduction of Marx implies that Freud's comparison should be taken literally, that is, logically, and not analogically.

Regarding the second point we can note that the specificity of Lacan's approach in comparison to Freudo-Marxism consists in the fact that he is not interested in translating psychoanalytic contents into Marxist contents, or the other way around. He is not interested in shaping Marx's contents, so that they would be "integrated" into psychoanalysis. His emphasis is on logic, and in Lacan's teaching logical links are never innocent. Logic (and notably mathematical logic) is understood as the "science of the real," aiming at the paradoxes of the symbolic order, or on what Lacan in *Seminar XVI* calls "discursive consequences." By claiming that the relation

between Marx and Freud is logical, he therefore redirects the debate towards the structural deadlocks within the social bond, and on the logical connection between these deadlocks and production. The relation between Marxism and psychoanalysis changes as well. To illustrate this change let me recall the famous passage from Lacan's responses to the Epistemological circle of École normale supérieure:

Only my theory of language as structure of the unconscious can be described as something that is implied by Marxism, if only you are not more demanding than material implication [...] my theory of language is true, no matter what the sufficiency of Marxism turns out to be, and it is necessary for Marxism, no matter what defaults it produces to it. So much for the theory of language that Marxism implies logically. (AE, 208.)

Naturally, to say Marxism does not mean the same as to say Marx. And it is clear that Lacan aims here at Stalin's intervention into Soviet linguistic debates. Nevertheless the movement of Lacan's teaching will take a direction that can be summed up in an implication as simple as this: "If Marx then Lacan." We can recall that a material implication is false (0) only when truth implies something false. In other words, we have only the options that Marx is true, which implies Lacan's theory of language as something true; or Marx is false, which nevertheless implies Lacan's theory of language as true; there is, naturally, the third option in which both Marx and Lacan would be false, but let their opponents engage with this position.

Lacan then turns towards the theory of language that Marxism implied historically, pointing out the debate regarding Marxism, which considered language as "superstructure," a debate that was interrupted by Stalin's "order" that "language is *not* a superstructure."⁵ The logical relation is here already pointed out in its discrepancy with the historical relation—which is based on a series of misunderstandings on both sides (for instance Freud's critique of Marxism as a "worldview," Marxist critique of psychoanalysis as a bourgeois practice etc.). Then Lacan concludes as follows:

The minimum that you can admit to me regarding my theory of language, if that interests you, that it is materialist. The signifier is matter that transcends itself into language. (AE, 209.)

I will not make an exegesis of this complex statement here, but I can briefly indicate that the definition of the signifier proposed in this passage is not unrelated with Marx's notion of "commodity language" and with his demonstration of impossibility to delimit commodity language from language of political economists (cf. the famous prosopopeia of commodities that concludes the discussion of commodity fetishism in the first volume of *Capital*). The lesson of Marx's critique of fetishism is that there is no metalanguage, and that language therefore *is* commodity language. But Lacan's answer also points out that he considered his contribution both to Marxist debates and to the debates surrounding the articulation of Marx with Freud in the connection between logic and materialism, a connection that he will recapitulate in his notion of discourse. And one could even claim that this connec-

tion of formalization and materialism, the *matheme* doctrine, can be considered as the persistence of dialectics in Lacan's teaching.

It is apparent at this point that there is a significant shift in Lacan's teaching in the mid-1960's: his theory of language is no longer referred exclusively to structural linguistics but also to the critique of political economy. The reason for this shift lies in the fact that Lacan finds in Marx something that Saussurean structuralism failed to offer, precisely the theory of production, or better a theory of production that departs from discursive asymmetry or social non-relation. Considering this connection between production and social non-relation Lacan will claim that Marx invented the function of the symptom, which is again a logical function: the proletariat as the social symptom embodies the truth of the social bond, which consists in the fact that there is no social relation, that theories of "contract," be it social or economic—liberty, equality, freedom and Bentham, as Marx famously puts it,—are constructions, the function of which is to mask a discursive deadlock. But in order to understand the shift that leads Lacan to homology, let me make here a longer detour via Saussure.

In his *Course in general linguistics*, Saussure draws a strong analogy between linguistics and political economy. He justifies this analogy with the fact that they are both sciences of values. But as such sciences they are both internally doubled. This doubling is caused by the temporal dimension of their object. In order to illustrate his point, Saussure first gives examples of sciences, where time does not cause particular complications in the structure of the scientific field and object. Such a case is astronomy, which investigates changes in the composition of stars, the temporality of which does not call for an inner differentiation of astronomy as such; the same holds for geology, which, on the one hand, explores different geological epochs, and can, on the other hand, provide descriptions of unchangeable states. In short, the temporal shift does not change the object of research.

All these conditions of scientificity change in linguistics and political economy, where the object transforms depending on whether we think it within or without temporality (which also means: within or without the relation to a body—the speaking body, the working body). Political economy and economic history form two separated disciplines within one science, and the same goes for static linguistics and evolutionary linguistics. As I have already mentioned, the reason for this immanent split within the two sciences lies in the concept of value: "Both sciences are concerned with a *system for equating things of different orders*—labour and wage in one and a signified and signifier in the other."⁶ Of course, the notion of value has a different meaning in economy and in linguistics. But the common trait of both understandings of value consists in the structure of exchange. From the perspective of value, the relation of labour to wage is logically identical with the relation between the signified and the signifier. Commodity exchange is structured as a language.⁷ But the system of equivalence can have two directions. Equivalence can concern things here and now (commodity exchange), as well as things in temporal succession (production). Here the split produced by the notion of value finally en-

ters the picture. Saussure illustrates it with the intersection of two axes, the axis of simultaneities that designates the relations between co-existing things, and from which the dimension of time is excluded; and the axis of successions, “on which only one thing can be considered at a time but upon which are located all the things on the first axis together with their changes.”⁸

In linguistics, this distinction is absolute, imperative, for “language is a system of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms.”⁹ This distinction is therefore necessary in a field that has no external determination or from which it is, so to speak, impossible to step out: language and market, two fields that know no exteriority. Because of this absoluteness, their scientific discussion is possible only by splitting it to its temporal and atemporal aspects. Language and the market can be scientific objects only insofar as their positive existence is stained with the same break that, according to Lacan, reveals the Other as inexistent. Because they have no exteriority they do not exist. Because they have no exteriority they are internally barred.

The passage from Saussure’s *Course* concludes with the introduction of synchronicity and diachronicity, describing the split within linguistics (static linguistics and evolutionary linguistics) and the split within the object itself. Language is both state *and* movement, and if linguistics focuses only on the static, atemporal aspect of language, it becomes the “ponding of knowledge,” as Lacan will say in *Encore*. For this reason he will later also claim that he strives to construct a linguistics that would take language “more seriously,” considering more the temporality of language, or as he also puts it, its “life.”¹⁰ Lacan’s *linguisterie* will consequently become a critique of linguistics, and antiphilosophy a critique, not of philosophy, as one might think, but of university discourse (including capitalism). All these efforts of Lacan’s later teaching affirm the Marxian notion of critique.

Saussure compares the inscription of language into the intersection of synchronicity and diachronicity with a chess-game, not only because it brings together the static and the dynamic dimension of language but also because it acknowledges that the value of particular elements depends on their position on the chessboard. Signifiers have value only insofar as they relate to other signifiers. Value is not something that would be immanent to signifiers as such, but emerges from difference. The logic of the signifier is here very unambiguously related to the logic of exchange.

This point can be described as critical because with it Saussure reveals and rejects what we could call linguistic fetishism or fetishisation of language. In the history of philosophy we can detect two versions of such fetishism. First in *Cratylus*, where Plato strives to demonstrate the relation between words and things, and thus to think linguistic value as an immanent feature of the signifier: language is presented in mimetic relation to *physis*, so that on the very level of its basic elements, its phonemes, we encounter an imitation of natural sounds. Plato tries to demonstrate that the relation between the signifier and the signified is as such rooted in nature,

and that signifiers always-already mean something in themselves: meaning and value overlap, the signifiers are supposed to have “natural” meanings. Another case of linguistic fetishism can be situated in the pragmatic tradition that leads back to Aristotle’s *Organon*. Although this pragmatism does not want to demonstrate any natural link between *logos* and *physis*, it nevertheless continues to presuppose that the nature of language consists in referentiality and communication. Language is understood as an *organon*, a tool, an organ, and even if it appears that this reduces language to its communicational “use-value,” we find the same hypothesis as in Plato: the signifier, in itself, supports a relation between words and things, between the symbolic and the real. There is more at stake here than the mere problematic of language. What Plato and Aristotle do is the following: on the case of language they repeat the very same operation as in relation to usury. Just like usury detaches money from its social function, turning it into an obscene self-reproducing entity (*Geld heckendes Geld*, as Marx will put it), the sophists, these usurers in language, detach language from its supposed communicative and relational function, turning it into an apparatus of jouissance.¹¹ The signifier becomes denaturalized; it starts causing “pleasure in speaking,” as Aristotle will explicitly claim in *Metaphysics*. And this is tantamount to the evacuation of value from the field of meaning.

A further pertinence of Saussure’s comparison of language with chess resides in the fact that the system is only temporary and depends on the rules of the game, which remain unaltered. The passage from one synchronicity to another takes place with each move, establishing a new distribution of figures and new relations, thereby modifying the values between particular figures. But Saussure expresses the following reserve:

At only one point is the comparison weak: the chess player *intends* to bring about a shift and thereby to exert an action on the system, whereas language premeditates nothing. The pieces of language are shifted—or rather modified—spontaneously and fortuitously. [...] In order to make the game of chess seem at every point like the functioning of language, we would have to imagine an unconscious or unintelligent player.¹²

Here the Freudian discovery gets its full weight. Did not Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* do precisely this, namely draw a strict equivalence, in all points, between chess and language? He did this precisely by presupposing an unconscious player. But with this presupposition Freud complicated the matter, because what *The Interpretation of Dreams* actually discovers as the unconscious is internally doubled on unconscious desire and dream work. The unconscious player is split into Two, and in order to illustrate this Two, and the specific relation they stand in, he will refer to nothing other than political economy: unconscious desire plays the part of the capitalist, dream work the role of the labourer. What is important to note here is that Freud separates intention from the subject. The unconscious desire is *intention without a subject*, whereas the dream work, once it stands in relation to the unconscious desire, implies a *subject without intention*: the subject of the signifier (Freud will say that the dream work does not think, nor calculate, nor judge).¹³ By linking

language and labour with the unconscious Freud modifies the figure of the speaker *and* the labourer: *ça parle*, as Lacan will say, but we could also add, *ça travaille*. This is already the first point where the path of psychoanalysis reaches beyond the Saussurean project, and points towards Marx's analysis of labour.

The common ground that brings together Marx, Saussure and Freud is the key role of the form in the constitution of their scientific object. Marx discovers that the commodity form captures the subject into the fetishist relation to value; Saussure shows that the linguistic form displays a discrepancy between value and meaning; and finally the Freudian analysis leads to the conclusion that the unconscious formations do not only carry meaning but also codify *jouissance*: they bear the "value of *jouissance*."¹⁴ The analysis of form aligns two heterogeneous kinds of production: the production of meaning and the production of value. Use-value in Marx describes a commodity that has only the meaning of satisfying needs, whereas (exchange) value points towards an "other satisfaction," as Lacan will say in *Encore*, one that parasites on the satisfaction of needs, but aims at production of surplus value. To this production no need corresponds, and this is also why Lacan will later claim that *jouissance* is something that serves to nothing (it does not presuppose any use-value).

2. Homology and materialism

When Lacan elaborates the idea of homology between the Marxian and the Freudian discovery, he expresses his regret that he did not introduce Marx earlier into "the field in which he is after all fully at home."¹⁵ Let us define this field by recalling what the homology is supposed to explain: it concerns "the place where we need to situate the essential function of object *a*."¹⁶ We first notice that the homology is also a homotopy. It concerns both the (logical) function of object *a*, and the (structural) place of this function in the discourse that constitutes the network of social bonds. There is an immediate connection between logic and topology. This overlapping of homology and homotopy has its conceptual development in Lacan, namely the progressive identification of topology and structure, explicitly formulated in *L'étourdit*,¹⁷ but already indicated in the very title of *Seminar XVI* (1968-69), *D'un Autre à l'autre*: from an Other to the other. The focus is no longer on the Other as such, but on the logico-spatial connection between the big Other (language) and the small other, object *a*, the function and the place of production, appearing in its two fundamental roles, surplus value and surplus *jouissance*. A year later, in *Radiophonie*, Lacan will even go on saying that "*Mehrwert* is *Marxlust*, Marx's surplus *jouissance*,"¹⁸ leaving no doubt that the social contextualization of surplus *jouissance* is surplus value. We see again that speaking about an analogy would mean to see in surplus value a metaphor of surplus *jouissance*, and the other way around; and we would be dealing with a parallel: what is surplus value in capitalist social bond is surplus *jouissance* in psychic life. Lacan does not say this. He says surplus value *is* surplus *jouissance*, redirecting the debate on the logical

articulation of the subjective and the social, and thereby also de-substantializing the notion of *jouissance*. We can also remind ourselves that psychoanalysis rejects the division of the subjective and the social. All Freud's efforts consisted in placing psychoanalysis on the very border between the two spheres, pointing out a (topo)logical continuity between the subjective sphere and the social bond. The Lacanian notion of discourse formalizes this Freudian movement. It describes both the structure that articulates itself in the individual speech, and the structuration of the social sphere. The discourse thus becomes the "management of *jouissance*," whereby *jouissance* itself is detached from the subjective reference. The Lacanian lesson here would be that there is no subject of *jouissance*, just like for Marx there is no subject of surplus value.

Marx is said to have been familiar with the function of object *a*, because his theory of the capitalist mode of production turns around the relation between representation (of labour) and production (of value). This is how Lacan introduces his reading:

Marx departs from the function of the market. His novelty is the place where he situates labour. It is not that labour is something new, but that it is bought, that there is a market of labour. This is what allows Marx to demonstrate what is inaugural in his discourse and what is called surplus value.¹⁹

The point of departure is the connection between market and labour, with which Marx determines the coordinates that will enable him to trace the historic transformation of labour under capitalism, and alongside the transformation of the subject into labour-power.²⁰ Hence we can say that Marx departs from the relation between the subject and the Other. The market appears as a battery of values that designate relations between commodities ("the immense collection of commodities" that constitutes the wealth of nations is precisely this battery); the field in which commodity exchange takes place appears as homogeneous and structured on stable and predictable relations, just like in the Saussurean analogy, where there are only values that designate commodities. The introduction of labour, Marx's permanent and apparently insignificant insisting that it is not enough to say "labour" but "socially productive labour," shifts the discussion from the mere relation between values to a more complex feature of the capitalist discourse that includes four levels: production, distribution, exchange and consumption. Marx shows that the same problem, the same discrepancy traverses all these levels, which continuously turns around the way labour is represented in terms of value.

When labour is freed from its feudal boundaries, when it becomes something that is sold, a commodity, this shift from the commodity market to the market of labour—a process that Lacan calls "the absolutisation of the market"—reveals an anomaly within the logic of representation as such, and simultaneously demonstrates how this anomaly gives rise to an entirely new historic mode of production. The anomaly discovered by Marx in the transformation of the commodity market, already present in previous historic regimes, into the labour market is linked with two things: firstly, with the introduction of a new commodity, the labour power,

that is, an exceptional commodity, the only commodity-producing commodity; and secondly, to the fact that as soon as we think of labour as something that is being sold, just like any other commodity, we are dealing with an internal break, a minimal shift, a discrepancy in representation: representation of commodity-producing commodity in terms of value becomes problematic, because both value and production are internally differentiated. This will be the point of departure of Lacan's homology.

In his classical Saussurean phase, Lacan defined the signifier as what represents the subject for another signifier. In *Seminar XVI*, he relates this definition to Marx, claiming that it is "copied from the fact that, in what Marx deciphered, namely economic reality, the subject of exchange value is represented next to the use-value."²¹ We can again recall the Saussurean comparison of the relation between the signifier and the signified with the relation between wage and labour. But while with Saussure the comparison remained in the frames of political economy (where all commodities are considered as equal), Lacan actually focuses on a gap between commodities (products of labour) and commodity (labour power).

Let us consider carefully what Lacan says in his redefinition of the signifier in terms of value-representation. He actually sums up the very same discrepancy that Marx extensively analyzes in the first 200 pages of *Capital*, that is, the discrepancy that reveals the capitalist mode of production as a non-relation between two different circulations. As we know, the circulation $C-M-C$ formalizes the exchange (selling and buying), and aims at the equivalence Saussure was already talking about in his analogy; the circulation $M-C-M$ (that Marx also writes $M-C-M'$, whereby $M' = M + \Delta M$), on the other hand, no longer produces equivalence but non-equivalence or difference within apparent equivalence. Lacan speaks of a gap in representation, and it is within this gap that the surplus value is produced. Marx considered the proletariat as a social symptom precisely because (s)he is a sign of the gap between the two circulations, a sign that there is no social relation.

There are two modes of circulation then: the first one, selling and buying, concerns the labourer, and the second, apparently symmetrical one, buying and selling, the capitalist. But what the labourer is selling is not the same thing as what the capitalist is buying, or to be more precise, the value for which the labour is sold is not the same as the value for which it is bought:

We pay labour with money, because we are on the market. We pay it according to its true price, as it is defined on the market by the function of exchange value. But there is unpaid value in what appears as the fruit of labour, because the true price of this fruit is in its use-value. This unpaid labour, which is nevertheless paid in the just way in relation to the consistency of the market in the functioning of capitalist discourse, is surplus value.²²

The apparently banal remark that we pay labour with money demonstrates its point if we remember the fundamental Marxian lesson regarding money. Since we are dealing with two different circulations, money appears once as money, in other words, as the general equivalent, that “sameness” that is expressed by all commodities that are exchanged, and once as capital. The labourer only deals with money as money, that is, the labour power is only represented in terms of exchange value, and in this regard the labourer gets paid according to the “just” price. The capitalist, on the other hand, deals with money as capital, and from this perspective the use of the labourer does not consist so much in producing commodities but in producing the surplus. The labourer gets paid “fairly,” according to the representation in terms of exchange value. But since the production is internally doubled the just payment is simultaneously unjust. Translated into the vocabulary of the logic of the signifier: the subject is represented only as far as it is misrepresented. The subject of exchange value is represented next to the use-value hence means that labour power implies a fundamental non-identity because value is internally differentiated on use-value and value, and because exchange value cannot stand alone. This is where Lacan passes over to the question of *jouissance*: “Henceforth non-identical to itself the subject no longer enjoys. Something called surplus *jouissance* is lost.”²³ There is a loss (of *jouissance*) implied in its very production, and the basic point that Lacan makes here is that the subject is not the one to enjoy. Again, there is no subject of *jouissance*.

Marx described this as alienation, whereby we also need to take into account that the concept of alienation becomes radicalized in *Capital*, since it is no longer referred to some presupposed “human essence.” The key figure here is of course abstract labour or labour power, which showed that Marx’s effort was to depsychologise and deindividualize the labourer—but *not* in order to present it as collective labourer. Better put, the subject produced by capitalism, the proletarian, is irreducible both to individual labourer and to collective labourer. The labourer as subject is an effect produced by the transformation of the commodity market into the labour market. Consequently, Lacan also seems to claim that we are not only dealing with a homology between the two surpluses, but also with the same subject: the subject of capitalism is the same as the subject of the signifier.

What I want to point out here is the very expression *Arbeitskraft*, where the expression *Kraft* (power but also force) seems to bear the same meaning as in physics. For Lacan, and I think he is merely following Marx here, there is a connection between the transformation of the market and the discursive consequences of modern science, which place formalization in relation to the real. There are two ways that Lacan frames this position in *Seminar XVI*: “reduction of materiality” (*réduction du matériel*) and “renunciation to *jouissance*,” two fundamental discursive effects, around which Lacan develops his materialist reading of the discourse.

Let us first take a brief look at the renunciation to *jouissance*. Lacan starts by reminding his audience that this renunciation needs to be related to labour, which is

in itself nothing new. What is new is the way how Marx and Freud, starting from this renunciation, “correct” Hegel:

From the very start, contrary to what claims or seems to claim Hegel, it is precisely this renunciation that constitutes the master, who knows very well how to make it the principle of his power. What is new here is that there is a discourse that articulates this renunciation and makes it appear within something that I will call the function of *surplus jouissance*.²⁴

The novelty of Marx’s analysis is that he links surplus value with the discrepancy in the representation of labour, making this discrepancy the fundament of the capitalist social bond. Accordingly, the novelty of Marx’s approach resides in the fact that he defines society as grounded on non-relation.

If we think the Marxian and the Freudian project together, their shared novelty consists not so much in the focus on the relation between labour and renunciation but in the discovery that this “renunciation to *jouissance* is an effect of discourse,”²⁵ and more importantly, that the capitalist mastery is grounded on the connection between this renunciation and production. Insofar as commodity in capitalism is defined as a product of human labour, it presents itself as something that contains surplus value. Every object carries a stamp of surplus, but this stamp is simultaneously a stamp of lack. This relation between the surplus and the lack, against the background of the relation between renunciation and *jouissance*, is the driving force of the capitalist discourse, or as Lacan himself puts it elsewhere: “Surplus value is the cause of desire of which a certain economy has made its principle: that of the extensive and therefore unsatisfiable production of a lack-of-*jouissance*.”²⁶

The function of object *a* reveals the double character of the object that assumes the place of production. Surplus value and surplus *jouissance* are caught in a parallax structure that makes them appear once as surplus and once as lack. Discourse produces both surplus *jouissance* and lack of *jouissance*, but it is the *same* production, and the same *jouissance*. And the structural reason for this doubling lies again in the deadlock of representation.

Surplus *jouissance* is lost for the subject, thus the subject is not the one to enjoy. The commodity, as such, becomes the sign of the evacuation of *jouissance*: commodity is *jouissance* without *jouissance*, which means that it is stamped with surplus *jouissance*. We could then think that the one to enjoy is the capitalist, since he appropriates surplus value. But actually this is not the case, and Marx makes it very clear when he states that capitalists are merely administrators (or personifications) of capital. Capitalism is socialized hoarding, which is why the capitalist economy needs the fantasy of a social relation, the “contract” between the labourer and the capitalist, the “just” price, which is in constitutive discrepancy with the “true” price. Justice is the founding lie of capitalism. And if we return to the question of “who enjoys?” we could say that, in capitalism, *jouissance* reveals itself as what it essentially is, a presupposition that supports the intertwining of surplus and lack in an objectal function. Everyone is “supposed to enjoy,” when in fact no one actu-

ally does: no one is in possession of *jouissance* because the production of surplus *jouissance* is the same as the production of lack-of-*jouissance*. It is this supposition of *jouissance* that is pointing towards this new figure of the master that Lacan indicates when he speaks of the capitalist discourse as the discourse that is based on the articulation of renunciation to *jouissance*. This renunciation is the source of capitalist power, and the new figure of the master, produced together with capitalism, is no other than what Freud described the unconscious desire, the headless master.²⁷

Before concluding I would like to quickly address the second point: the reduction of materiality. With this, Lacan approaches the relation between scientific and capitalist discourse. If, for Koyré, the revolution in modernity consisted in the passage from the “closed world” to the “infinite universe,” or from the “world of approximation” to the “universe of precision,” then Lacan addresses this passage within the development of language. This is how he condenses this point in *Seminar XVI*:

It is more than possible that the emergence of surplus value in the discourse was conditioned by the absolutization of the market. The latter is hard to separate from the development of certain effects of language, and this is why we have introduced surplus *jouissance*. In order for surplus value to be defined as a follow-up there needed to be the absolutization of the market, up to the point to swallow labour itself.²⁸

Here we see the kernel of Lacan’s argument: the absolutization of the market responds to another absolutization that concerns the functioning of the scientific discourse, the ideal of formalization. Once formalization becomes the privileged access to the real, a specific development takes place in the functioning of language. Lacan calls this development reduction of materiality and links it back to the historical emergence of logic, with the difference that the scientific modernity establishes a connection between formalization and the infinite. Both operations, as Marx has already shown, leave their mark on the historical development of capitalism. What is the metamorphosis of labour, the absolutization of the market, if not a reduction of materiality that, as Marx explicitly puts it in *Capital*, instead of freeing the labourer from labour, frees labour from its content?

I would like to mention another point that Lacan makes with the reduction of materiality (formalization). In *Seminar XVI* he constantly repeats, “discourse has consequences,” whereby he is taking discursive production as the point where the connection between logic and materialism should be sought. I would again claim that the role of formalization in Lacan is logically equivalent to the role of dialectics in Marx (we can play with the thought that Lacan makes with mathematical formalization what Marx claims to have made with Hegelian dialectics—making it walk on its feet again, thus forcing its materialist character). It is dialectical precisely in the sense that it does not formalize something existent (the “great Outdoors” that exists independently from life and thinking, as Quentin Meillassoux would put it); what is formalized is, rather, something that *inexists independently within life*

and thinking, an irreducible inexistence, the “there is no” of sexual relation and of social relation. In short, what is formalized, in both Marx and Lacan, is inexistence with consequences, an *effective inexistence*. Precisely in this sense mathematical logics, as science of the real, is materialist, because it thinks the convergence of the symbolic towards the impossible: it thinks positive, that is, material effects of an independent and irreducible inexistence: class struggle (History) does not exist but nevertheless has social consequences, the Other (language) does not exist but nevertheless has bodily consequences.

Lacan starts his materialist reading of the discursive production by drawing the equivalence between the structure and the real: “Structure should be taken in the sense in which it is something upmost real, the real itself,” or further, “Structure is therefore the real. This is in general determined by its convergence towards the impossible. Precisely in this the structure is real.”²⁹ Within Saussure this understanding of structure has no place. There the structure is simply equivalent to the symbolic order (the system of differences, the system of equivalence). The overlapping of structure and the real will get another expression in the following statement: “Let us say that in general it is not worth speaking of anything else than of the real in which discourse has consequences.”³⁰ In this shift from the supposed real as absolute exteriority to the discursive real lies the entire Lacanian concept of the real. In this formalization, the central problem concerns the discursive operation that brings together the logic and the real:

If you operate this reduction of materiality you do this why? In order to evaluate a functioning, in which consequences can be grasped. When you grasp these consequences you articulate them in something you can consider as metalanguage—only that this “meta” merely causes confusion. For this reason I will only claim that if in discourse we can distinguish something that should be called with its proper name, logic, this distinction is always conditioned by a reduction of materiality and by nothing else.³¹

Here Lacan naturally speaks of his own use of formalization, which consists in grasping the consequences, that is, the real kernel of discursive production. One such kernel for Lacan is connected with the problem of *jouissance*, which is why the entire follow-up to *Seminar XVI* will elaborate a formalized theory of social bonds. But his (mis)use of formalization is not the only thing that is addressed here. Lacan also aims at the transformation of labour under capitalism. Discursive consequences in question need to be related to the constitution of subjectivity: “Mathematical logic is highly essential for your existence in the real, whether you know it or not.”³² There is an intimate relation between the reduction of the materiality, the place of the subject in the discourse, and the production of surplus.

The homology of surplus value and surplus *jouissance* then logically passes over to the constitution of subjectivity. The place of the proletarian and the place of the subject of the unconscious is the same. And further development of Lacan’s teaching will take precisely this direction. Two quotes to illustrate this point: “Let

us say that the unconscious is the ideal labourer, the one Marx made the flower of capitalist economy in the hope to see him take over the relay from the master's discourse";³³ and "There is only one social symptom—every individual is really a proletarian, having no discourse to form a social bond, differently put, a semblant. This is where Marx got stuck in an incredible fashion."³⁴

The proletarian as the subject of the unconscious? This claim, of course, has its implications that are codified in Lacan's statements, "the unconscious is politics" and "the unconscious is history," which means that in psychoanalysis a certain displacement, but also a radicalization of Marx's analysis of capitalism can be discerned. This radicalization does not necessarily pretend to offer a solution, but it does, at least, expose a problem: the capitalist mode of *jouissance* that makes us all reproduce capitalism in the unconscious. It is for this reason that psychoanalysis, as far as it consists in modifying the subjective relation to *jouissance*, should be considered in logical continuity with Marx's project of a critique of political economy. Unfortunately this is something that psychoanalysts themselves, today more than ever, tend to forget, and instead celebrate the fact that the capitalist state occasionally admits that they are "serving the public good."³⁵

Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVI, D'un Autre à l'autre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), 16.
2. See also Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XXI, Les non-dupes errent*, 20 November 1973, unpublished, where Lacan already translates the Freudian *Lustgewinn* with *plus-de-jouir*.
3. The appropriate quote goes as follows: "The motive force, which the dream required had to be provided by a wish; it was the business of the worry to get hold of a wish to act as the motive force of the dream. The position may be explained by an analogy. A daytime thought may very well play the part of entrepreneur for a dream; but the entrepreneur, who, as people say, has the idea and the initiative to carry it out, can do nothing without the capital; he needs a capitalist who can afford the outlay, and the capitalist who provides the psychical outlay for the dream is invariably and indisputably, whatever may be the thoughts of the previous day, a wish from the unconscious." Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, et. al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), vol 4, 560-561. Freud's emphasis. I will discuss this passage more extensively in Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*, forthcoming in 2013.
4. Freud does claim that the unconscious knows no time, but as Slavoj Žižek has shown on several occasions, this atemporal aspect of the unconscious is the same as the atemporality of ideology that Marx already thematized in his early writings (see notably *German Ideology* and *Misery of Philosophy*). The connection between both atemporalities, ideological and unconscious, was first pointed out by Althusser. It is therefore easy to understand, why the unconscious appears as something that transcends 'concrete cultural circumstances,' while simultaneously being determined by the logic of capitalist discourse.

5. For a detailed contextualization of the Stalinist “axiom” in Lacan’s teaching see Jean-Claude Milner, *L’oeuvre claire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995).
6. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in general linguistics* (New York: The Philosophical library, 1959) 79.
7. Here I can already underline the problematic aspect of Saussure’s comparison. Namely, he does not pick any relation between commodity and value, but the most problematic relation that puts the entire political economy under question, the relation between “commodity producing commodity” and its representation in terms of value. He thus picks an example that would have to orientate him towards the critique of political economy, which will be precisely Lacan’s case. But let us for now follow Saussure’s line of reasoning.
8. Saussure, 80.
9. Saussure, 80.
10. See Jacques Lacan, “Peut-être à Vincennes...,” in *Autres écrits*, 313-314. What Lacan in *Seminar XX* and in *Television* calls linguisterie relates to linguistics in the same way as critique of political economy to political economy.
11. For a systematic discussion of the problem of value in Plato and Aristotle see Marcel Hénaff, *Le prix de la vérité* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002).
12. Saussure, 80. Saussure actually says that the unconscious player would need to be presupposed, and not imagined.
13. The subject without an intention is caught between the signifier of unconscious desire (S1) and all other signifiers (S2). For Freud the unconscious labourer comprises heterogeneous operations that Interpretation of Dreams nevertheless classifies into four categories, the two main ones being condensation and displacement, or translated into linguistic vocabulary metaphor and metonymy.
14. An expression that will serve Lacan to translate the notion of exchange value.
15. Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVI, D’un Autre à l’autre*, 16.
16. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 16.
17. Just to recall some crucial passages: “Is topology not this notspace (n’espace), where the mathematical discourse leads us and which necessitates a revision of the Kantian aesthetics? No other stuff should be given to it than this language of pure matheme...” Jacques Lacan “L’étourdit,” in *Autres écrits*, 472. Further: “Structure is the real, which shows itself in language. Of course it has no relation whatsoever with a ‘correct form,’” *Autres écrits*, 476. And finally: “Topology is not ‘made to guide us’ in the structure. Topology is this structure—as a retroaction of the chain order of which consists language.” *Autres écrits*, 483.
18. Jacques Lacan, “Radiophonie,” *Autres écrits*, 434.
19. Lacan, *Le Séminaire XVI*, 17.
20. For a Lacanian reading of Marx’s theory of the subject see Jean-Claude Milner, *Clartés de tout*, Paris: Verdier, 2011.
21. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 21.
22. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 37.
23. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 21.
24. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 21.

25. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 21.
26. Lacan, "Radiophonie," 435.
27. I can add here that the question of repression (of unconscious desire) and the question of accumulation (of capital) point toward the same temporal-logical problem or paradox: they presuppose a primitive accumulation and a primal repression. Here the homology and homotopy between Marx and Freud continues since they both discover a double structure in repression and accumulation (they both have to take twice in order to take place at all). We can formulate a provisory thesis that repression is the logical pendant of the capitalist accumulation in the unconscious.
28. Lacan, *Le Séminaire XVI*, 37.
29. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 30.
30. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 31.
31. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 34.
32. *Le Séminaire XVI*, 35.
33. Jacques Lacan, "Télévision," in *Autres écrits*, 518.
34. Jacques Lacan, "La troisième," in: *La Cause freudienne*, 79, Paris: Navarin, 2011, 18. In *Seminar XX* Lacan proposed what he called 'his' hypothesis, which goes as follows: the individual that is affected by the unconscious is the same as the subject of the signifier. We can say that Lacan's subject-hypothesis, too, is copied from Marx. Marx's subject-hypothesis is namely: the individual that is exploited by capitalism is the same as labour power (or the subject of value). This, of course, does not mean that the subject is reduced back to the individual. On the contrary, Lacan's subject-hypothesis is a specific translation of Freud's *Wo Es war soll Ich werden*, and it is no coincidence that the main theoretical struggle of Lacan's teaching evolves around the understanding of Freud's sentence. From its understanding depends the entire political range of psychoanalysis.
35. Another political moment of Lacan's return to Freud lies in his matheme doctrine. While today several analysts remain stuck in what one could easily call the mysticism of clinical experience and of poetic interpretation, Lacan insisted on the transmissible character of psychoanalysis. As soon as psychoanalysis is entirely reduced to the clinical hermetism psychoanalysts themselves risk to become experts, that is, they start believing in their own status of "subjects supposed to know," Psychoanalysts as the experts, united in the supposed impenetrability of clinical experience, risk turning psychoanalysis into a reactionary discipline, or simply into a church of experts, that will be only capable assuming cynical positions towards contemporary political struggles.