

## **TheoryLeaks**

Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Politics

# **'Can One Exit from The Capitalist Discourse Without Becoming a Saint?' by Slavoj Žižek**

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The Capitalist  
Discourse Without  
Becoming a Saint?**

**Slavoj Žižek**



In his [Television](#), Lacan evokes the “exit from the capitalist discourse,” but the context in which he does it is crucial: he posits the psychoanalyst “in relation to what was in the past called: being a saint”<sup>1</sup> , and, after some qualifications of the excremental subjective position of a saint, he concludes: “The more one is a saint, the more one laughs; that’s my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse — which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some.”<sup>2</sup> What characterizes a saint is thus not his high moral stance (Lacan explicitly mentions his rejection of distributive justice) but his distance from every symbolic identity, his withdrawal from the domain of exchange, of reciprocity, of word’s bond. What this means is that one shouldn’t make too much out of Lacan’s “anti-capitalism”: exit from capitalist discourse is clearly reserved “only for some”, it’s the exception which seems to confirm the universal rule... But is this all, or can we use Lacan’s theory to draw more radical conclusions for the emancipatory struggle? Let’s begin with a brief account of what one might clumsily call the “libidinal economy” of today’s global capitalism.

Within the coordinates of the hegemonic ideology, global capitalism appears as a limitless cycle of expanded self-reproduction that threatens to swallow everything in its crazy dance, undermining all traditional fixed forms of social life, in psychoanalytic terms: as a libidinal regime which suspends the reign of law/castration. A multiplicity of ideological forms then impose themselves which promise to constrain the socially destructive effects of this dynamics, i.e., to enable us to have the cake (of capitalist dynamics) and eat it, from traditional religious and moral systems (“Asian values,” etc.) to ecology. This opposition – limitless capitalist expansion versus its external limits – is, however, a false one: it ignores the limit (antagonism) that is immanent to the capitalist system, and that propels its very limitless

expansion. From the libidinal standpoint, capitalism is a regime of perversion, not psychosis: it disavows castration, it does not exclude or suspend it:

“capitalism entails a generalization of the perverse jouissance at the level of the social link, an insurmountable horizon, in which a thousand perversions may blossom, while the general social framework remains unchangeable: the closed world of commodity form, whose polymorphous nature enables the processing, integration and neutralization of all forms of antagonism. The capitalist subject mocks castration, declares it an anachronism and a remainder of the phallogocentric universe that the postmodern has overcome once and for all. Castration, and consequently psychoanalysis, is considered to be merely one of those famous grand narratives, whose end needs to be acknowledged. In the end, this position conceives capitalism as a vicious circle, from which it is impossible to break out.”<sup>3</sup>

One has to make a choice here – generalized perversion or psychosis? A pervert is not psychotic, it does not rely on the autism of jouissance: in perversion, castration is disavowed, not excluded/ suspended, it remains operative as the absent point of reference – the more the subject disavows it the more its weight is felt. Unfortunately, Lacan himself seems to oscillate here, sometimes he talks about capitalism as perversion, sometimes as a psychotic “foreclosure,” as in the following Deleuze-sounding lines:

“What distinguishes the capitalist discourse is this – Verwerfung, rejection from all the fields of symbolic, with all the consequences that I have already mentioned. Rejection of what? Of castration. Every order, every discourse that aligns itself with capitalism leaves aside what we will simply call the matters of love.”<sup>4</sup>

This is why global consumerist capitalism is in its basic structure Spinozean, not Kantian: it effectively appears as a flow of absolute immanence in which multiple effects proliferate, with no cuts of negativity/castration interrupting this flow: “Capitalism rejects the paradigm of negativity,

castration: the symbolic operation that constitutes the subject as split and decentralized.”<sup>5</sup> It is in this sense that contemporary capitalism is “post-political,” and, consequently, the “return of negativity, in the guise of castration, can serve as a minimal localization of the political dimension of psychoanalysis.”<sup>6</sup>

However, “autism of jouissance” is definitely not the norm in contemporary permissive-hedonist capitalism, but rather its excess, a surrender to unconstrained consummation whose exemplary cases are drug addiction and alcoholism. The impasses of today’s consumerism provide a clear case of the Lacanian distinction between pleasure and enjoyment: what Lacan calls “enjoyment (jouissance)” is a deadly excess over pleasure, i.e., its place is beyond the pleasure-principle. In other words, the term plus-de-jour (surplus- or excess-enjoyment) is a pleonasm, since enjoyment is in itself excessive, in contrast to pleasure which is by definition moderate, regulated by a proper measure. We thus have two extremes: on the one hand the enlightened hedonist who carefully calculates his pleasures to prolong his fun and avoid getting hurt, on the other hand the jouisseur proper, ready to consummate his very existence in the deadly excess of enjoyment – or, in the terms of our society, on the one hand the consumerist calculating his pleasures, well-protected from all kinds of harassments and other health threats, on the other hand the drug addict (or smoker or...) bent on selfdestruction. Enjoyment is what serves nothing, and the great effort of the contemporary hedonist-utilitarian “permissive” society is to incorporate this un(ac)countable excess into the field of (ac)counting. One should thus reject the common sense opinion according to which in a hedonistconsumerist society we all enjoy: the basic strategy of enlightened consumerist hedonism is on the contrary to deprive enjoyment of its excessive dimension, of its disturbing surplus, of the fact that it serves nothing. Enjoyment is tolerated, solicited even, but on condition that it is healthy, that it doesn’t threaten our psychic or biological stability: chocolate yes, but fat free, coke yes, but diet, coffee yes, but without caffeine, beer yes, but without alcohol, mayonnaise yes, but without cholesterol, sex yes, but safe sex...

We are here in the domain of what Lacan calls the discourse of University, as opposed to the discourse of the Master: a Master goes to the end in his consummation, he is not constrained by petty utilitarian considerations (which is why there is a certain formal homology between the traditional aristocratic master and a drug-addict focused on his deadly enjoyment), while the consumerist's pleasures are regulated by scientific knowledge propagated by the university discourse. The decaffeinated enjoyment we thus obtain is a semblance of enjoyment, not its Real, and it is in this sense that Lacan talks about the imitation of enjoyment in the discourse of University. The prototype of this discourse is the multiplicity of reports in popular magazines which advocate sex as good for health: sexual act works like jogging, strengthens the heart, relaxes our tensions, even kissing is good for our health.

Gaze and voice are inscribed into the field of normative social relations in the guise of shame and guilt. Shame is obviously linked to the Other's gaze: I am ashamed when the (public) Other sees me in my nudity, when my dirty intimate features are publicly disclosed, etc. Guilt, on the contrary, is independent of how others see me, what they talk about me: I am guilty in myself, the pressure of guilt comes from within, emanating from a voice that addresses me from the core of my being and makes me guilty. The opposition gaze/voice is thus to be linked to the opposition shame/guilt as well as to the opposition Ego Ideal / superego: superego is the inner voice which haunts me and culpabilizes me, while Ego Ideal is the gaze in view of which I feel ashamed. These couples of oppositions enable us to grasp the passage from traditional capitalism to its hedonist-permissive version that predominates today: the hegemonic ideology no longer functions as Ego Ideal whose gaze makes me ashamed when I am exposed to it, the Other's gaze loses its castrative power; it functions as an obscene superego injunction which makes me guilty (not when I violate symbolic prohibitions but) for NOT fully enjoying, for never enjoying enough.

When, exactly, does the objet a function as the superego injunction to enjoy? When it occupies the place of the Master-Signifier, i.e., as Lacan formulated it in the last pages of his Seminar XI, when the short-circuit between S1 and

a occurs.<sup>7</sup> The key move to be accomplished in order to break the vicious cycle of the superego injunction is thus to enact the separation between S1 and a. Consequently, would it not be more productive to follow a different path: to start with the different *modus operandi* of the objet a which in psychoanalysis no longer functions as the agent of the superego injunction – as it does in the discourse of perversion? This is how Jacques-Alain Miller’s claim of the identity of the analyst’s discourse and the discourse of today’s civilization should be read: as an indication that this latter discourse (social link) is that of perversion. That is to say, the fact that the upper level of Lacan’s formula of the discourse of the analyst is the same as his formula of perversion (a – \$) opens up a possibility of reading the entire formula of the discourse of the analyst also as a formula of the perverse social link: its agent, the masochist pervert (the pervert par excellence), occupies the position of the object-instrument of the other’s desire, and, in this way, through serving his (feminine) victim, he posits her as the hystericized/divided subject who “doesn’t know what she wants” – the pervert knows it for her, i.e., he pretends to speak from the position of knowledge (about the other’s desire) which enables him to serve the other; and, finally, the product of this social link is the Master-signifier, i.e., the hysterical subject elevated into the role of the master (dominatrix) whom the pervert masochist serves.

In contrast to hysteria, the pervert knows perfectly what he is for the Other: a knowledge supports his position as the object of his Other’s (divided subject’s) jouissance. For that reason, the formula of the discourse of perversion is the same as that of the analyst’s discourse: Lacan defines perversion as the inverted fantasy, i.e. his formula of perversion is a – \$, which is precisely the upper level of the analyst’s discourse. The difference between the social link of perversion and that of analysis is grounded in the radical ambiguity of objet petit a in Lacan, which stands simultaneously for the imaginary fantasmatic lure/ screen and for that which this lure is obfuscating, for the void behind the lure. Consequently, when we pass from perversion to the analytic social link, the agent (analyst) reduces himself to the void which provokes the subject into confronting the truth of his desire. Knowledge in the position of “truth” below the bar under the “agent”, of

course, refers to the supposed knowledge of the analyst, and, simultaneously, signals that the knowledge gained here will not be the neutral “objective” knowledge of scientific adequacy, but the knowledge which concerns the subject (analysant) in the truth of his subjective position. Recall Lacan’s outrageous statements that, even if what a jealous husband claims about his wife (that she sleeps around with other men) is all true, his jealousy is still pathological; along the same lines, one could say that, even if most of the Nazi claims about the Jews were true (they exploit Germans, they seduce German girls...), their anti-Semitism would still be (and was) pathological – because it represses the true reason WHY the Nazis NEEDED anti-Semitism in order to sustain their ideological position. So, in the case of anti-Semitism, knowledge about what the Jews “really are” is a fake, irrelevant, while the only knowledge at the place of truth is the knowledge about why does a Nazi NEED a figure of the Jew to sustain his ideological edifice.

But is perversion for this very reason not closer to the University discourse? For Lacan, a pervert is not defined by the content of what he is doing (his weird sexual practices). Perversion, at its most fundamental, resides in the formal structure of how the pervert relates to truth and speech: the pervert claims direct access to some figure of the big Other (from God or history to the desire of his partner), so that, dispelling all the ambiguity of language, he is able to act directly as the instrument of the big Other’s will. In this sense, both Osama bin Laden and President Bush, although political opponents, share the structures of a pervert. They both act upon the presupposition that their acts are directly ordered and guided by divine will. And Stalin is to be added to this series: a Bolshevik is not a subject but an object-instrument of historical necessity. It is the sadist pervert himself who occupies the place of the object, i.e. who assumes the position of the pure object-instrument of the Other’s jouissance, displacing the division constitutive of subjectivity onto the other, onto his victim. (In this respect, the sadist perversion is very close to obsessional neurosis, with the only (yet crucial) difference that the sadist pervert is active in order to generate the Other’s jouissance, while the obsessional neurotic is active for precisely the opposite reason, i.e. in order to prevent the Other’s enjoyment – pour que ca

ne bouge pas dans l’autre, as they put it in French.) Such a position of the knowledge of the agent is what defines the University discourse, so if we are to understand the libidinal economy of capitalism, it is crucial to raise the question of the link between capitalism and the University discourse.

The thesis on “inherent transgression” does not amount to a simple commonsense point that a set of values, laws, etc., in order to survive, must accommodate itself to the complexity of real life, tolerate compromises, etc. What distinguishes superego shadowy rules from this kind of worldly “wisdom” is that (1) the superego paralegal network is experienced as obscene, permeated with enjoyment, and (2) for that reason, it must remain publicly non-acknowledged, i.e. its public revelation disintegrates the system. Or, to put it in yet another way, superego shadowy unwritten rules are the remainder of the original lawless violence which founded the rule of Law itself – this violence is not something present only at the beginning, it must be here all the time in order for the rule of law to maintain itself. Superego unwritten rules are the synchronous aspect of the diachronous process of the imposition of law through the lawless act of violence – or, rather, this diachronous process, the story of the “original crime”, is the narrativization of the necessary, structural, synchronous incoherence of the law.

The unique impact of *The Matrix* (movie) resides not so much in its central thesis (what we experience as reality is an artificial virtual reality generated by the “Matrix,” the mega-computer directly attached to all our minds), but in its central image of the millions of human beings leading a claustrophobic life in water-filled cradles, kept alive in order to generate the energy (electricity) for the Matrix. So when (some of the) people “awaken” from their immersion into the Matrix-controlled virtual reality, this awakening is not the opening into the wide space of the external reality, but first the horrible realization of this enclosure, where each of us is effectively just a fetus-like organism, immersed in the pre-natal fluid... This utter passivity is the foreclosed fantasy that sustains our conscious experience as active, self-positing subjects – it is the ultimate perverse fantasy, the notion that we are ultimately instruments of the Other’s (*Matrix*’s) *jouissance*, sucked

out of our life-substance like batteries. Therein resides the true libidinal enigma of this dispositif: WHY does the Matrix need human energy? The purely energetic solution is, of course, meaningless: the Matrix could have easily found another, more reliable, source of energy which would have not demanded the extremely complex arrangement of the virtual reality coordinated for millions of human units. The only consistent answer is: the Matrix feeds on the human's jouissance – so we are here back at the fundamental Lacanian thesis that the big Other itself, far from being an anonymous machine, needs the constant influx of jouissance. This is how we should turn around the state of things presented by the film: what the film renders as the scene of our awakening into our true situation, is effectively its exact opposition, the very fundamental fantasy that sustains our being.

The intimate connection between perversion and cyberspace is today a commonplace. According to the standard view, the perverse scenario stages the “disavowal of castration,” and isn't cyberspace also a universe unencumbered by the inertia of the Real, constrained only by its self-imposed rules? And is not the same with Virtual Reality in *The Matrix*? The “reality” in which we live loses its inexorable character, it becomes a domain of arbitrary rules (imposed by the Matrix) that one can violate if one's Will is strong enough... However, according to Lacan, what this standard notion leaves out of consideration is the unique relationship between the Other and the jouissance in perversion. What, exactly, does this mean? Recall Pierre Flourens's claims that the anaesthetic works only on our memory's neuronal network: unknowingly, we are our own greatest victims, butchering ourselves alive... Isn't it also possible to read this as the perfect fantasy scenario of inter-passivity, of the Other Scene in which we pay the price for our active intervention into the world? There is no active free agent without this fantasmatic support, without this Other Scene in which he is totally manipulated by the Other. A sado-masochist willingly assumes this suffering as the access to Being. Therein resides the correct insight of *The Matrix*: in its juxtaposition of the two aspects of perversion – on the one hand, reduction of reality to a virtual domain regulated by arbitrary rules that can be suspended; on the other hand, the concealed truth of this freedom, the reduction of the subject to an utter instrumentalized

passivity.<sup>8</sup> It is only against this background that we can properly understand how the late-capitalist permissive-hedonist discourse motivates subjects with the

“demand for jouissance without castration – vivre sans temps mort, jouir sans entraves, to recall the famous graffiti from 1968 – is the productive ground for the jouissance of the system. Life without boredom (dead time) and enjoyment without restriction (or without castration) inaugurate a new, more radical and invisible form of exploitation. Of course, the inevitable truth of creativity, mobility and flexibility of labour is the creativity, mobility and flexibility of the capitalist forms of domination.”<sup>9</sup>

One should note how this stance of constant “creativity, mobility and flexibility,” in which work and enjoyment coincide is shared by late capitalist subjectivity as well as by the Deleuzian and other grass roots direct democracy movements. Youtube is lately full of sites in which ordinary people present a recording (usually one hour long) of themselves accomplishing some ordinary chore like baking a cake, cleaning a bathroom, or painting their car – nothing extraordinary, just a regular activity whose predictable rhythm engenders a soothing effect of peace in the viewer. It is easy to understand the attraction of watching such recordings: they enable us to escape the vicious cycle of the oscillation between nervous hyper-activity and bouts of depression. Their extraordinary nature resides in their very ordinariness: the totally predictable everyday chores are more and more rare in our frantic daily rhythm.

One has to make a step further here and raise a more specific question: if “the inevitable truth of creativity, mobility and flexibility of labor is the creativity, mobility and flexibility of the capitalist forms of domination,” how, precisely, are the two identified (or, rather, mediated)? We are dealing with permissive capitalism focused on intense untrammelled enjoyment, a capitalism whose libidinal economy disavows castration, i.e., a capitalism which no longer relies on the paternal Law and is celebrated by its apologists as the reign of generalized perversion. Consequently, since the core of

perversion is defined by the couple of sadism and masochism, the question to be raised is: how does the libidinal economy of permissive hedonist capitalism relate to this couple? In general terms, the difference between sadism and masochism concerns the status of shame: the goal of sadist’s activity is not just to make the victim suffer but to cause shame in the victim, to make him/her ashamed of what is happening to him/her. In masochism, on the contrary, the victim no longer experiences shame, it openly displays its *jouissance*. So even if in a masochist performance the same thing goes on as in a sadist exercise – say, a master beating its victim –, the line separating the two gets blurred since

“behind its contract a subversion of domination took place. The subject, who can enjoy in the position of the object, is the only true master, while the apparent executor is merely a prop, a subject for whom the contract presupposes not to enjoy. The contract demands a castrated master, deprived of the power to cause shame.”<sup>10</sup>

In short, the gaze of the Master (big Other) no longer gives birth to shame and is no longer castrative but gets itself castrated: impotent, unable to control or prevent the servant/victim’s *jouissance*. However, this impotence is deceptive:

“subjects offer themselves to the regime’s gaze and shamelessly exhibit *jouissance*, not knowing that the regime in the position they assume establishes the continuity between *jouissance* and labor. Once in the position of surplus-object, the students are themselves studied by the regime’s gaze.”<sup>11</sup>

Is it then true that “the masochist would indeed be the perfect subject of capitalism, someone who would enjoy being a commodity among others, while assuming the role of surplus labor, the position of the object that willingly satisfies the systemic demands”<sup>12</sup>? Is it true that “the capitalist regime demands from everyone to become ideal masochists and the actual message of the superego’s injunction is: ‘enjoy your suffering, enjoy capitalism’”<sup>13</sup>? The problem here is: can the contract between capitalist and

worker really be compared with the masochist contract? The first and obvious big difference is that in the labor contract, capitalist pays the worker (in order to extract from him surplus-value), while in the masochist contract, the victim pays the “master” to do the work, i.e., to stage the masochist performance which produces surplus-enjoyment in the victim. Is then the proletarian masochist the secret master who binds the Master-capitalist by a contract to torture him in order to gain his own surplus-enjoyment? While this version has to be rejected, one should nonetheless assert its underlying principle: *jouissance* IS suffering, a painful excess of pleasure (pleasure in pain), and, in this sense, *jouissance* effectively IS masochist. (Recall that one of Lacan’s definitions of *jouissance* is precisely “pleasure-in-pain”: the surplus that transforms pleasure into *jouissance* is that of pain.) However, one should also recall that the masochist contract sets a limit to the excess, thereby reducing the masochist spectacle to a sterile theatrical performance (in an endless circular movement of postponement, the spectacle never reaches a climax) – in this sense, the masochist spectacle is rather a kind of “pleasurisation” of *jouissance*, in contrast to sadism which goes to the end in brutality (although, again, there are also masochists who go to the end in torturing...)

Furthermore, how does class antagonism inscribe itself into the capitalist discourse? Insofar as it functions as University discourse, things are clear: the capitalist is the agent of knowledge who dominates workers, and the product of this domination is \$, the proletarian pure subject deprived of all substantial content. However, what happens insofar as it functions as Hysteric’s discourse? To put it bluntly, which is the class determination of the hysteric as the agent of the capitalist discourse? Is the hysteric the proletarian as the product of the university discourse? And is then the Master he (the hysteric) provokes the capitalist (who pretends to act as a bearer of knowledge, a rational manager organizing the production, but whose truth is being the Master who exerts domination)? But what if the obverse also holds, i.e., what if the capitalist is a hysteric caught in the infernal self-propelling cycle of extended reproduction, provoking his own true Master, the Capital itself? And what if the true agent of knowledge is the worker who keeps running the production process through his know-how?

In short, what if the tension between the University discourse and the Hysteric’s discourse runs diagonally across both poles of the class antagonism, dividing each of the two?

Consequently, when we talk about “capitalist discourse,” we should bear in mind that this discourse (social link) is split from within, that it only functions if it constantly oscillates between two discourses, discourse of University and discourse of Hysteria. Therein resides the parallax of capitalism which can also be designated in the terms of the opposition between desire and drive: hysterical desire and perverse drive. The overlapping element of the two is \$ (subject), the product of the University discourse and the agent of the Hysterical discourse, and, simultaneously, S<sub>2</sub> (knowledge), the product of the Hysterical discourse and the agent of the University discourse. Knowledge works on its other, object, and the product is the subject, \$; the axis of the impossible is the way this subject relates to its Master-Signifier that would define its identity. In the reversal to the discourse of hysteria, the agent is now the subject who addresses its other as the Master-Signifier, and the product is knowledge about what the subject is as an object; but since this knowledge is again impossible, we get a reversal into the discourse of University which addresses the object. It’s the twisted structure of the Moebius band, of course: progressing to the end on one side, we all of a sudden find ourselves on the other side. (And is the other axis not the axis of Master and Analyst, with objet a and S<sub>1</sub> as the overlapping elements? One should also note that each of these two couples combines a masculine and a feminine sexual logic: masculine university versus feminine hysteria, masculine master versus feminine analyst.) Does this intertwining of two discourses not provide the underlying discursive structure of the double aspect of modernity, the hysterical logic of incessant expanded subjective productivity and the university logic of domination through knowledge? That is to say, what we perceive as “modernity” is characterized by two different topics. First, it is the notion of subjectivity as a destabilizing force of incessant self-expansion and self-transcending, as the agent possessed by an insatiable desire; then, there is the specifically modern form of control and domination whose first embodiment is the baroque absolutist state, and which culminated in the XXth century “totalitarian” state

analyzed by Foucault (discipline and punish), Adorno and Horkheimer (instrumental reason, administered world), etc., the form which entered a new stage with the prospect of digital control and biogenetic manipulation of human beings. In its ideological aspect, this duality appears in the terms of the opposition between individualist libertarianism and state control. It is crucial not to reduce the parallax structure by way of reducing one topic to the other – say, by way of dismissing the self-expanding subjectivity to an ideological illusion that obfuscates the truth of total control and domination, or by way of simply identifying the two topics (the self-expanding subject asserts its power through control and domination).

One has to make a step further here. The parallax split of the capitalist discourse is grounded in the fact that capitalism remains a master discourse, but a master discourse in which the structure of domination is repressed, pushed beneath the bar (individuals are formally free and equal, domination is displaced onto relations between things-commodities). In other words, the underlying structure is that of a capitalist Master pushing his other (worker) to produce surplus-value that he (the capitalist) appropriates. But since this structure of domination is repressed, its appearance cannot be a(nother) single discourse: it can only appear split into two discourses. Both University discourse and Hysterical discourse are the outcome of the failure of the Master’s discourse: when the Master loses its authority and gets hystericized (which is another name for questioning his authority, experiencing it as a fake), authority reappears in a displaced way, de-subjectivized, in the guise of the authority of neutral expert-knowledge (“it’s not ME who exerts power, I just state objective facts and/or knowledge”).

Now we come to an interesting conclusion: if capitalism is characterized by the parallax of hysteria and university discourses, is then resistance to capitalism characterized by the opposite axis of master and analyst? The recourse to Master does not designate the conservative attempts to counteract capitalist dynamics with a resuscitated figure of traditional authority; it rather points towards the new type of Communist master (Leader) emphasized by Badiou who is not afraid to oppose the necessary

role of the Master to our “democratic” sensitivity: “I am convinced that one has to reestablish the capital function of leaders in the Communist process, whichever its stage.”<sup>14</sup> A true Master is not an agent of discipline and prohibition, his message is not “You cannot!”, also not “You have to...!”, but a releasing “You can!” – what? Do the impossible, i.e., what appears impossible within the coordinates of the existing constellation – and today, this means something very precise: you can think beyond capitalism and liberal democracy as the ultimate framework of our lives. A Master is a vanishing mediator who gives you back to yourself, who delivers you to the abyss of your freedom: when we listen to a true leader, we discover what we want (or, rather, what we always-already wanted without knowing it). A Master is needed because we cannot accede to our freedom directly – to gain this access we have to be pushed from outside since our “natural state” is one of inert hedonism, of what Badiou called “human animal.” The underlying paradox is here that the more we live as “free individuals with no Master,” the more we are effectively non-free, caught within the existing frame of possibilities – we have to be pushed/disturbed into freedom by a Master.<sup>15</sup> Novalis, usually perceived as a representative of the conservative turn of Romanticism, was well aware of this paradox, and he proposed an extreme version of the infinite judgment: monarchy is the highest form of republic, “no king can exist without republic and no republic without a king”:

“the true measure of a Republic consists in the lived relation of the citizens to the idea of the whole in which they live. The unity that a law creates is merely coercive. [...] The unifying factor must be a sensual one, a comprehensive human embodiment of the morals that make a common identity possible. For Novalis, the best such mediating factor for the idea of the republic is a monarch. [...] While the institution might satisfy our intellect, it leaves our imagination cold. A living, breathing human being [...] provides us with a symbol that we can more intuitively embrace as standing in relation to our own existence. [...] The concepts of the Republic and monarch are not only reconcilable, but presuppose one another.”<sup>16</sup>

Is not Badiou making a similar claim when he underscores the necessity of a Leader? Novalis’s point is not just the banality that identification should not be merely intellectual (the point made also by Freud in his *Mass Psychology and Ego Analysis*); the core of his argumentation concerns the “performative” dimension of political representation: in an authentic act of representation, people do not simply represent (assert through a representative) what they want, they only become aware of what they want through the act of representation: “Novalis argues that the role of the king should not be to give people what they think they want, but to elevate and give measure to their desires. [...] The political, or the force that binds people together, should be a force that gives measure to desires rather than merely appealing to desires.”<sup>17</sup>

However, no matter how emancipatory this new Master is, it has to be supplemented by another discursive form. As Moshe Lewin noted in his *Lenin’s Last Struggle*,<sup>18</sup> at the end of his life, even Lenin intuited this necessity when he proposed a new ruling body, the Central Control Commission. While fully admitting the dictatorial nature of the Soviet regime, he tried

“to establish at the summit of the dictatorship a balance between different elements, a system of reciprocal control that could serve the same function – the comparison is no more than approximate – as the separation of powers in a democratic regime. An important Central Committee, raised to the rank of Party Conference, would lay down the broad lines of policy and supervise the whole Party apparatus, while itself participating in the execution of more important tasks /.../. Part of this Central Committee, the Central Control Commission, would, in addition to its work within the Central Committee, act as a control of the Central Committee and of its various offshoots – the Political Bureau, the Secretariat, the Orgburo. The Central Control Commission /.../ would occupy a special position with relation to the other institutions ; its independence would be assured by its direct link to the Party Congress, without the mediation of the Politburo and its administrative organs or of the Central Committee.”<sup>19</sup>

Checks and balances, the division of powers, mutual control... this was Lenin's desperate answer to the question: who controls the controllers. There is something dream-like, properly fantasmatic, in this idea of CCC: an independent, educational and controlling body with an "apolitical" edge, consisting of best teachers and technocratic specialists keeping in check the "politicized" CC and its organs – in short, the neutral expert knowledge keeping in check the party executives... However, all hinges here on the true independency of Party Congress, de facto already undermined by the prohibition of factions which allowed the top party apparatus to control the Congress, dismissing its critics as "factionalists." The naivety of Lenin's trust in technocratic experts is all the more striking if we bear in mind that it comes from a political who was otherwise fully aware of the all-pervasiveness of political struggle which allows for no neutral position. However, Lenin's proposal cannot be reduced to this dimension; in "dreaming" (his expression) about the mode of work of the CCC, he describes how this body should resort

“to some semi-humorous trick, cunning device, piece of trickery or something of that sort. I know that in the staid and earnest states of Western European such an idea would horrify people and that not a single decent official would even entertain it. I hope, however, that we have not yet become as bureaucratic as all that and that in our midst the discussion of this idea will give rise to nothing more than amusement. / Indeed, why not combine pleasure with utility? Why not resort to some humorous or semi-humorous trick to expose something ridiculous, something harmful, something semi-ridiculous, semi-harmful, etc.?”<sup>20</sup>

Is this not an almost obscene double of the "serious" executive power concentrated in CC and Politburo, a kind of non-organic intellectual of the movement – an agent resorting to humor, tricks, and cunning of reason, keeping itself at a distance... a kind of analyst. To properly locate this reading of Lenin, one should take note of the historicity inscribed into Lacan's matrix of four discourses, the historicity of the modern European development.<sup>21</sup> The Master's discourse stands – not for the pre-modern master, but – for the absolute monarchy, this first figure of modernity that

effectively undermined the articulate network of feudal relations and interdependences, transforming fidelity to flattery, etc.: it is the “Sun-King” Louis XIV with his *l’etat, c’est moi* that is the Master par excellence. Hysterical discourse and the discourse of University then deploy two outcomes of the vacillation of the direct reign of the Master: the expert-rule of bureaucracy that culminates in contemporary biopolitics which ends up reducing the population to a collection of *homo sacer* (what Heidegger called “enframing,” Adorno “the administered world,” Foucault the society of “discipline and punish”); the explosion of the hysterical capitalist subjectivity that reproduces itself through permanent self-revolutionizing, through the integration of the excess into the “normal” functioning of the social link (the true “permanent revolution” is already capitalism itself). Lacan’s formula of four discourses thus enables us to deploy the two faces of modernity (total administration; capitalist-individualist dynamics) as the two ways to undermine the Master’s discourse: the doubt into the efficiency of the Master-figure (what Eric Santner called the “crisis of investiture”<sup>22</sup>) can be supplemented by the direct rule of the experts legitimized by their knowledge, or the excess of doubt, of permanent questioning, can be directly integrated into social reproduction as its innermost driving force. And, finally, the analyst’s discourse stands for the emergence of revolutionary-emancipatory subjectivity that resolves the split into university and hysteria: in it, the revolutionary agent (a) addresses the subject from the position of knowledge which occupies the place of truth (i.e., which intervenes at the “symptomal torsion” of the subject’s constellation), and the goal is to isolate, get rid of, the Master-Signifier which structured the subject’s (ideologico-political) unconscious.

Or does it? Miller<sup>23</sup> has recently proposed that, today, the discourse of Master is no longer the “obverse” of the discourse of the Analyst; today, on the contrary, our “civilization” itself (its hegemonic symbolic matrix, as it were) fits the formula of the discourse of the Analyst: the “agent” of the social link is today a, surplus-enjoyment, the superego injunction to enjoy; this injunction addresses \$ (the divided subject) who is put to work in order to live up to this injunction. If there ever was a superego injunction, it is the famous Oriental wisdom: “Do not think, just DO IT!” The “truth” of this

social link is S2 , scientific-expert knowledge in its different guises, and the goal is to generate S1 , the self-mastery of the subject, i.e., to enable the subject to “cope with” the stress of the call to enjoyment (through self-help manuals, etc.)... Provocative as this notion is, it raises a series of questions. If it is true, in what, then, resides the difference in the discursive functioning of the “civilization” as such and of psychoanalytic social link? Miller resorts here to a suspicious solution: in our “civilization,” the four terms are kept apart, isolated, each operates on its own, while only in psychoanalysis are they brought together into a coherent link: “in the civilization, each of the four terms remains disjoined [...] it is only in psychoanalysis, in pure psychoanalysis, that these elements are arranged into a discourse.”<sup>24</sup>

However, is it not that the fundamental operation of the psychoanalytic treatment is not synthesis, bringing elements into a link, but, precisely, analysis, separating what in a social link appears to belong together? This path, opposed to that of Miller, is indicated by Giorgio Agamben who, in the last pages of *The State of Exception*,<sup>25</sup> imagines two utopian options of how to break out of the vicious cycle of law and violence, of the rule of law sustained by violence. One is the Benjaminian vision of “pure” revolutionary violence with no relationship to the law; the other is the relationship to the law without regard to its (violent) enforcement – what Jewish scholars are doing in their endless (re) interpretation of the Law. Agamben starts from the right insight that the task today is not synthesis but separation, distinction: not bringing law and violence together (so that right will have might and the exercise of might will be fully legitimized), but thoroughly separating them, untying their knot. Although Agamben confers on this formulation an antiHegelian twist, a more proper reading of Hegel makes it clear that such a gesture of separation is what the Hegelian “synthesis” effectively is about: in it, the opposites are not reconciled in a “higher synthesis” – it is rather that their difference is posited “as such.” The example of Paul may help us to clarify this logic of Hegelian “reconciliation”: the radical gap that he posits between “life” and “death,” between life in Christ and life in sin, is in no need of a further “synthesis”; it is itself the resolution of the “absolute contradiction” of Law and sin, of the vicious cycle of their mutual implication. In other words, once the

distinction is drawn, once the subject becomes aware of the very existence of this other dimension beyond the vicious cycle of law and its transgression, the battle is formally already won.

However, is this vision not again a case of our late capitalist reality going further than our dreams? Are we not already encountering in our social reality what Agamben envisages as a utopian vision? Is the Hegelian lesson of the global reflexivization–mediatization of our lives not that generates its own brutal immediacy which was best captured by Etienne Balibar’s notion of excessive, non-functional cruelty as a feature of contemporary life, a cruelty whose figures range from “fundamentalist” racist and/or religious slaughter to the “senseless” outbursts of violence performed by adolescents and the homeless in our megalopolises, a violence one is tempted to call Id-Evil, a violence grounded in no utilitarian or ideological reasons? All the talk about foreigners stealing work from us or about the threat they represent to our Western values should not deceive us: under closer examination, it soon becomes clear that this talk provides a rather superficial secondary rationalization. The answer we ultimately obtain from a skinhead is that it makes him feel good to beat foreigners, that their presence disturbs him... What we encounter here is indeed Id-Evil, i.e., the Evil structured and motivated by the most elementary imbalance in the relationship between the Ego and jouissance, by the tension between pleasure and the foreign body of jouissance in the very heart of it. Id-Evil thus stages the most elementary “short-circuit” in the relationship of the subject to the primordially missing object–cause of his desire: what “bothers” us in the “other” (Jew, Japanese, African, Turk) is that he appears to entertain a privileged relationship to the object – the other either possesses the object–treasure, having snatched it away from us (which is why we don’t have it), or he poses a threat to our possession of the object. What one should propose here is the Hegelian “infinite judgment” asserting the speculative identity of these “useless” and “excessive” outbursts of violent immediacy, which display nothing but a pure and naked (“nonsublimated”) hatred of the Otherness, with the global reflexivization of society; perhaps the ultimate example of this coincidence is the fate of psychoanalytic interpretation. Today, the formations of the Unconscious (from dreams to hysterical symptoms) have

definitely lost their innocence and are thoroughly reflexivized: the “free associations” of a typical educated analysand consist for the most part of attempts to provide a psychoanalytic explanation of their disturbances, so that one is quite justified in saying that we have not only Jungian, Kleinian, Lacanian... interpretations of the symptoms, but symptoms themselves which are Jungian, Kleinian, Lacanian..., i.e. whose reality involves implicit reference to some psychoanalytic theory. The unfortunate result of this global reflexivization of the interpretation (everything becomes interpretation, the Unconscious interprets itself) is that the analyst’s interpretation itself loses its performative “symbolic efficiency” and leaves the symptom intact in the immediacy of its idiotic jouissance.

Perhaps, this is how the capitalist discourse functions: a subject enthralled by the superego call to excessive enjoyment, and in search for a Master-Signifier that would constrain his/her enjoyment, provide a proper measure of it, prevent its explosion into a deadly excess (of a drug-addict, chain smoker, alcoholic and other –holics or addicts). How, then, does this version of the analyst’s discourse relate to the analyst’s discourse proper? Perhaps, one reaches here the limit of Lacan’s formalization of discourses, so that one should introduce another set of distinctions specifying how the same discourse can function in different modalities. What one should do here is distinguish between the two aspects of objet a clearly discernible in Lacan’s theory: objet a as the void around which desire and/or drive circulate, and objet a as the fascinating element that fills in this void (since, as Lacan repeatedly emphasizes, objet a has no substantial consistency, it is just the positivization of a void. So in order to enact the shift from capitalist to analyst’s discourse, one has just to break the spell of objet a, to recognize beneath the fascinating agalma, the Grail of desire, the void that it covers. (This shift is homologous to the feminine subject’s shift from Phi to the signifier of the barred Other in Lacan’s graph of sexuation.)

What, then, is our result? Perhaps, it is wrong to search for a capitalist discourse, to limit it to one formula. What if we conceive capitalist discourse as a specific combination of all four discourses? First, capitalism remains Master’s discourse. Capital, the Master, appropriates knowledge, the

servant’s savoir-faire extended by science, keeping under the bar the proletarian \$ which produces a surplus-enjoyment in the guise of surplus-value. However, due to the displacement of the standard of domination in capitalism (individuals are formally free and equal), this starting point splits into two, hysteria and university. The final result is the capitalist version of the analyst’s discourse, with surplus-enjoyment/value in the commanding post.

## Notes

1. Lacan, p. 15.
2. Ibid., p. 16
3. Tomšič, 2015, p. 151
4. Lacan 2011, p. 74.
5. Tomšič, 2015, p. 151-2.
6. Ibid., p. 152.
7. See Lacan 1979.
8. For a more detailed reading of *The Matrix*, see Chapter VI of Žižek 2007.
9. Tomšič 2015, p. 228.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 227.
12. Ibid., p. 228.
13. Ibid., p. 229.
14. Personal communication (April 2013).
15. It’s not as easy as it may appear to be a true Master – the problem with being a Master is the one formulated succinctly by Deleuze: *si vous etes pris dans le reve de l’autre, vous etes foutu* (If you’re trapped in the dream of the other, you’re fucked up!). And a Master definitely is caught in the dream of others, his subjects, which is why his alienation is much more radical than that of his subjects – he has to act in accordance with this dream-image, i.e., he has to act as a person in another’s dream. When Mikheil Chiaureli, the ultimate Stalinist director, held a screening of *The Vow* (*Klyatva*, 1946) for Stalin, the latter disapproved of the ending scene in which he is shown kissing Varvara’s (the heroine’s) hand. Stalin

told Chiaureli that he never kissed a woman's hand in his life, to which Chiaureli gave a perfect reply: "The people know better what Stalin does and doesn't do!" Good for him that this reply didn't cost him his head (probably because he was Stalin's drinking buddy).

16. Novalis, *Glauben und Liebe*, quoted from Ross 2008, p. 27.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 27
18. See Lewin 2005 (translation of the French original published in 1968)
19. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
20. "Better Few, But Better," available online at [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/mar/02.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/mar/02.htm).
21. Lacan deploys the matrix of four discourses in Lacan 1996
22. See Santner 1996.
23. See "La passe. Conférence de Jacques-Alain Miller," IV Congrès de l'AMP – 2004, Comandatuba – Bahia, Brasil.
24. *Ibid.*
25. See Agamben 2004..