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Apocalypse Now? Barbarism and Psychoanalysis: On an Apocalyptic Tone Adopted Today in Psychoanalysis

As an Introduction or From One Title to Another

The title I propose for this article, pastiche of two prestigious previous ones [1] and answers Jean-Pierre Lebrun's article title ("The 21st Century Will Be Lacanian Or It Will Be Barbarian"[2]) with an anti-sentence, as he, in turn, takes on the pastiche by Charles Melman from an apocryphal sentence by Malraux[3]. As a way to underline, with a humorous hint, the differences I hold—and plan on noting—with the positions of these two writers, with whom I share many questions and worries, but whose diagnosis, perspectives and responses I diverge from. I intend to study these differences in a dialectical way, in *disputatio* and not in polemic, according to our common interest, that of psychoanalysis, its place and its contribution to the topicality of the mutation we are witnessing.

Regarding the title that Lebrun borrows from Melman, one could ask, not without surprise, if this new century only had the alternative of being "barbarian or Lacanian". With such an abrupt presentation, this title calls for two preliminary remarks. The first one consists in questioning the exclusive logic: "or". After all, this logic could be inclusive: why wouldn't this century be barbarian "and" Lacanian? More radically, and especially more seriously, one could wonder what or which form of prescience gives psychoanalysts the authority to assert such radical statements[4].

Beyond its peremptory and binary characteristics, this title by J.-P Lebrun calls upon something that can in no way leave us indifferent: barbarity. What is surprising in this title is a preoccupation for barbarity to come, and not for present barbarity, current, quite real and not to mention past barbarity for which one doesn't need to go very far back to encounter its chilling examples[5]. Of course, these authors are not wrong to wonder and worry about barbarity to come. Even more so, that without having to wait for the future, *barbarity is here, actually here, as it has always been*. Freud justly taught us how much what we call "civilization", "Kultur", that we regard as one of our most precious gifts, is a fragile entity and that barbarity never lays very far away. More fundamentally, I would add that *what we call civilization is the constant, permanent and relentless battle against barbarity*. Without a doubt, psychoanalysis has its place in this battle. What this place might be, is yet to be determined.

Since Freud, psychoanalysis occupies a singular place in civilization and in culture[6]. An uncomfortable and conflicting one inasmuch as this young discipline brings to light this part of humans that constitute its estimate nucleus, its unthought-of and unheard, that which the founder for ever called unconscious. An unbearable and intolerable discovery, for it points out this place of strangeness to men itself, where it doesn't recognize itself, where it is not *causa sui*. Consequences are tremendous and reach way beyond practical and clinical aspects of the analytical praxis. Freud is the first one to have left an indelible trace of such effects in his legacy through texts in which he was already sketching what could be said, from psychoanalysis, about

society, religion and civilization in general: I am of course referring to *Totem and Taboo*, *The Future of an Illusion*, *Moses and Monotheism*, and moreover *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Jean-Pierre Lebrun, inspired by and quoting Ch. Melman, provides some very precise characteristics of this barbarity. He states: “Barbarism deserves a rigorous definition and I am happy to propose it to you. *It consists in a social relation organized by a power that is no longer symbolic but real*. From the moment that established power is supported, takes as reference its own force and nothing else, and does not try to defend or to protect anything other than its own existence as power, well then we are barbarian. (...) *Barbarism, for its part, is outside discourse*, it is not based on a discourse, it is based only on the number of agents that are at its service.”[7] It is worthwhile to pause on this affirmation, because it presents several difficulties: what is a “real” power? What would a power be outside discourse? A power outside symbolic (and outside imaginary)? This will be our starting point, not to comment on J.-P. Lebrun’s article[8], but so as to propose our arguments we summarize that of J.-P. Lebrun who echoes more or less Ch. Melman. I insist once more, that if I do share these and some other authors’ concerns and questions regarding the future of subjects and that of psychoanalysis in this current historical situation, I share neither their diagnosis nor their positions.

What are these positions, these arguments? There are many and deserve our attention. However, as here is not the place to delve into details, and in order to set up our debate, I propose a synthesis of those arguments that seem to occupy a specific place in the authors’ development. To summarize, here are some of the points made[9]:

- We are witnessing radical changes in civilization, whose effects on subjects are so radical, as to evoke an “anthropological mutation”. This assumption implies another one, asserted forcefully over and over again: subjects are “produced” through the social link.
- These changes immediately result in the appearance of three new forms: new subjects, new psychical economy, and new pathologies[10].
- There are many sources for these changes, among which one can ascertain (a) the collapse of the symbolic register, that is of the function of language; (b) the weakening, if not disappearance, of transcendental institutions that used to provide legitimacy and transmission of the norms; (c) the major phenomenon resulting from the previous statements, that is the collapse of the paternal function; (d) this disappearance opens a space for societies organized according to matriarchal and incestuous modalities; (e) as for subjects, the confluence of these factors produces subjects “shifting” from the symbolic function and the phallic function; (f) psychically, this results in the disappearance of repression thus replaced essentially by denial and split; (g) this psychical economy would be completely ruled by *Jouissance* (which one has yet to be specified) [11].

It would be quite easy for me to accumulate quotes from Melman and Lebrun’s work that, beyond the aforementioned title, would justify the apocalyptic tone I evoke in the title of this article. I don’t think it necessary, for the reader can refer directly to the numerous articles published by these authors. I prefer to focus on debating some of their arguments. There is, nonetheless, an important point on which we agree: we consider that the theory of Discourses[12] as developed by J. Lacan, comprises the most formidable tool at our disposal to “read”, not only the current crisis, but also the entanglement of the subject with the social and political realms inasmuch as these four structures of discourse grasp in a tight logic the diversity of links between the subjective and the social, and their agonistic or polemical relationship.

This relationship covers and recoups what is the essence of psychoanalysis itself: the dimension of conflict, the “discipline of conflict” as S. Leclaire called it. The fundamental question that will be encountered in the end is: what response do psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts have to provide in today’s configuration where the question of the subject and tension between discourse reaches a paroxysm, where the Master’s Discourse may be more than ever “the other side of psychoanalysis”? Another question will be raised to find out if these transformations—these agonistic relationships—again lead us to a “chronicle of a catastrophe (or

barbarism) foretold”.

Power, “Real” Power and the Question of These “Mechanisms”: Between Structure and History

What would this “Real” power be, the one Ch. Melman and J.-P. Lebrun announce at once together with its barbarian corollary? Which shape could it take? It appears to be a power whose only foundation would be violence. A power necessarily violent for it resides outside discourse (therefore outside language) and seeking only its own perpetuation as power. This calls for two remarks, at least. First, one should wonder if this human style of the jungle law has ever existed. Even animals do not engage in purely “real” fights [13] for they add a heavy dose of imaginary (courtship ritual, simulation, etc.) to their balance of power. However, any power in a human society, however brutal, arbitrary or violent it may be, encompasses these three registers that define human reality, in variable doses and through various manifestations: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

To pastiche one last time (and adding a neologism), one could say that *the history of humanity is the history of types of “subjects’ boarding”*; it implies that this “boarding” or “hailing”*, this control operated on subjects corresponds for each era to a reason that, albeit not necessarily reasonable, requires a special kind of rationality. What I call here “boarding” is the fact that individuals [14] are taken, including bodily, into a network comprised of discourses, institutions, laws, representations, narratives, and myths—I will later evoke its outline.

Contrary to what Lebrun and Melman claim, what can be observed in our so-called “advanced”, “post” or “hyper” modern societies, is precisely the opposite: it is not the advent of a power outside discourse, but the establishment of a much more subtle form of power, infinitely more elaborated, and in a way much more cunning (which does not mean less violent) than what we have experienced so far. This power lies upon the huge possibilities (that could seem infinite) that the development of techno-sciences have brought to civilization. I intend to further demonstrate why taking changes in civilization very seriously does not inevitably mean the collapse of a human “world”, *if one first acknowledges that this world, so-called human, has never ceased changing all along its history* [15].

Faced with this somehow Byzantine idea of a “Real” power, purely Real, outside discourse, I find it ineluctable and necessary to call upon the notion of “apparatus”*** as it has been conceptualized from Heidegger to Foucault and Deleuze. In the scope I give it through my attempt to think the subject from a psychoanalytic perspective, I cite the work of N.A. Braunstein [16] whose contribution to “apparatus” is accomplished in a synthetic manner (in the Hegelian sense) by making a singular substance out of what these three authors have proposed. According to Braunstein, the innovation brought by Foucault compared to Heidegger (and Deleuze furthers it) consists in integrating the notion of apparatus to that of practice and power: “The apparatuses’ function is to show how power relations end up establishing the conditions needed to enable the formation and political implementation (in their tactical and strategic dimension) of knowledge” (p.74) [17]. For this, the relationships between power, knowledge and subjectivity need be integrated, in the sense of a system controlling bodies through a composition of discourses and power. For Foucault, as for Deleuze, the apparatus is a network (he might have said: a structure) that can be established between heterogeneous components (discourses, institutions, rules, laws, scientific terms, philosophical or moral propositions, etc.). It is within this network that subjects find their place and act. Or rather: *are acted whereas they think they are acting*. The specific link between these various elements reveals, at a certain historic time, a specific form of rationality.

This rationality (with or without quotes) will end up being expressed by myriad elements, but one of them especially captures J.-P. Lebrun’s attention: the disappearance of transcendental norms, the collapse of reference, and the impossibility of an immanent common norm.

Yet again I need to indicate my disagreement on this important point. Norms are always articulated in conjunction with structures of socialization and the practice of power at a specific historical given moment. They currently take on another aspect, apparently less “normative”, but no less efficient nonetheless. In this regard, in his recent work P. Macherey [18] sketches precisely and exemplarily, from Marx to Foucault, the process that leads to the production of norms and their impact on subjects via socialization. If once norms were conveyed by what L. Althusser called the ISA (Ideological State Apparatuses*: family, church, army), today mass-media takes on the function of relaying normative discourses. I simply mean to highlight how P. Macherey’s development follows in the same path as what I proposed regarding the subtle use of power in society today. In reference to what Foucault called “the society of norms”, Macherey emphasizes how much behaviors are molded in modeled processes and hence become “indexed, catalogued and formatted according to functional criteria that escape speech, and pretend to prevail upon evidence (...) The order put in place with this type of procedure is of the most restrictive, *but it yields its coercion under insidious forms, gentler exactly because it does take as its source the subjects on whom it clenches*, anticipating their conduct, whom it prepares and leads towards their goals in incorporating itself into their development: and, when their behaviors do not match the set objectives, it sanctions them by rejecting them, putting them on the sidelines, without even having to formally condemn them. *Submission to norms no longer appears as an obedience to an external commandment, because it has become completely immanent pursuant to what we previously called a “second nature”, immanent to the processes that influences while securing them*” (p. 197)[19].

Let’s now get back to the apparatus. It can be characterized differently: *the apparatus is a dynamic structure subject to changes and modifications*. As per Braunstein [20]: “An apparatus is a structure in perpetual movement” (p. 79). But, as Foucault and Deleuze assert, it is a structure always inscribed in a power game. Without getting into details, let me give two remarks: first, in light of what I developed above, it would be quite difficult to speak of a “real” power since all power is caught in the apparatus’ network, which is itself a arrangement (I insist: Real, Symbolic and Imaginary) of power relations. Secondly, what Braunstein, like Foucault, configures as an “apparatus” is directly and tightly linked to what Lacan defines in his matrix of the four Discourses. This adds an essential aspect, that Lacan’s theory of the Discourses can clarify the agonistic relation of Discourses in conflictual coexistence within the social link. Additionally, since this will be of crucial importance below, the apparatus as defined by Foucault and Deleuze and furthered by Braunstein, puts in perspective different arrangements of the Master’s Discourse, and even more radically, of the current form of the Master’s Discourse, the Capitalist’s Discourse (in its curious copulation with science as Lacan depicted it). Thus, the topic of the apparatus enables the articulation with Lacan’s theory of Discourse inasmuch as this theory grants a “reading” of the inclusion of the subject in the complex process of today’s civilization.

Laying out the apparatus’ characteristics in terms of network or “structure in movement” (dialectic, I should add) leads to two utterances that could appear as excluding one another and have often been presented as antithetical, when in fact they have to be articulated: structure and history. The nodal point lays exactly on what could articulate them.

The point on which they could appear antithetical is that of immutability; the structure is conceived of as fixed or remaining the same regardless of changes. Well, this concept is deceptive. *It is necessary to consider that changes (historical, social, economical, scientific, technological, cultural) indeed occur and affect the structure in its appearance and its phenomenological displays, without altering the principles steering it*. Ch. Melman and J.-P. Lebrun’s arguments provide an excellent opportunity. to shed light on this difficulty. One of the main differences between our positions, I believe, rests on the fact that for these authors the upheaval we are witnessing today (and of which we are also objects) abolish in a way the structural foundation upon which subjects used to be “produced”[21]. I believe we can consider another angle to this problem: we are indeed facing a major transformation, but one in which the elements of the structure do not disappear, are not fundamentally modified, but are somehow shifted[22]. Without a doubt this shift generates different configurations, but the difference is relative as far as the structural stability is concerned. In this, it is the equivalent of a topological figure whose main characteristic is that its structure

remains unalterable through continuous distortion.

Today's Form of the Master's Discourse

The ruse of liberal reason rests on the *illusion* of autonomy: illusion that each one can be, have and become “whatever s/he wants”. The Capitalist's Discourse, under the guise of the market's discourse, invades all spaces (political, economic, social, artistic, etc.). It transforms subjects into permanent consumers of objects, which has direct effects on the production machine, but *leans for this on what is the foundation of subjects themselves: the lack*.

The ideal image the discourse offers to the so-called hypermodern subject encourages him to regard himself as his own author and actor, of his own discourse, his own becoming and his own destiny. A *self-made man* [in English in the text] considering himself unique, singular and original, without knowing that what he seems himself sees in the mirror has been laid out for him by this anonymous entity we call “the market”. A tremendous paradox results from this state of affair: subjects entertain an illusion of independence, autonomy, freedom, originality and singularity, whereas probably never have they been “as formatted” in their messages, their discourses, their way of life (thinking, clothing, feeding, playing, or in other words, consuming) [23].

This form of heightened narcissistic alienation operates as if it resulted from a purely self-referential operation. “As if” because it definitely is not the case: it is the effect of the market's discourse[24]. In Lacan's matrix, the Master's Discourse represents the subject as identified to the master signifier (S1) hence unacknowledging the split that constitutes him (\$), asking from knowledge (S2) the production of a surplus of enjoyment (a). I will attempt to demonstrate in which way the Capitalist's Discourse obeys the same structure while giving the illusion of being radically different. For this, it is necessary to detect the inflections Lacan introduces when he raises the Capitalist's Discourse on a few occasions (between 1969 and 1972).

This Capitalist's Discourse is raised by Lacan, named, enunciated and announced on few occasions, but Lacan never developed it. Only once did he let himself write it [25]. In this occasion, he proposed to invert S1 and \$, the latter taking the place of the agent (or semblance) of discourse. However, during the same conference, at the time when he “transgresses” his own premise, he clarifies and corrects: “The crisis, not of the Master's Discourse [26] but of the Capitalist's Discourse which is its substitute, is open.” Right after he wrote the “formula” of the Capitalist's Discourse for the first and only time, Lacan specifies “there are not 36 discourses, only four” [27]. A few months later, during the EFP Study Days in response to M. Safouan, Lacan adds an important and loaded sentence about the Capitalist's Discourse, one I will return to: “This is where the analytic discourse has the duty to follow, where it's* misdeeds show.”

What does Lacan try to make us understand with this framing of the Capitalist's Discourse as the new avatar of the Master's Discourse? In my reading, it is not the erasure of the subjective mark, but the *mirage* of a possible erasure, a “trompe-la-castration” (as a trompe-l'oeil, an optical illusion), as if the “copulation with science” or the multiform production of objects could overcome all possible desires and therefore all possible lack. From this point of view, it is not that the identificatory reference to the signifier of the Other disappears; to the contrary, it becomes a superegoic identification to this S1 of the market's discourse that, through putting S2 to work—i.e. knowledge and technique—produces objects aiming at, not satisfying needs, but tantalizing the hollow of the subject's lack, *fascinating*[28] him with objects whose role would be to fill in the lack. Subjects hence would become the “prosthetic gods” Freud[29] talked about, and from that point of view objects often are imbued with an undertone and take on the value of fetishistic objects, whose function we know of in castration.

Lacan emphasized this relationship to castration in a problematic sentence, after referring to the Capitalist's Discourse: "what distinguishes the discourse of capitalism is the Verwerfung*, the rejection from all the symbolic fields of the consequence I already spoke of: the rejection of what? Of castration." [30] Psychosis being a consequence of Verwerfung according to Lacan so, unless one considers—as some authors do—that we are now faced with "ordinary psychotics" [31], the question should be addressed differently: the Capitalist's Discourse works extraordinarily well [32] because it gives subjects the hope of escaping castration. Of course, it is not true, but the illusion is powerful: powerful like those objects themselves, produced to mask, erase the subjective lack.

I consider that the Capitalist's Discourse, this "little change" as Lacan says, consists in giving the subject the illusion that I just described, but that it only is the effect induced by the Master's Discourse in its current form, this discourse whose S1 is condensed into the injunction already spoken of: "(to become yourself) consume and enjoy." I would add that the Capitalist's Discourse in its current modality of "Discourse of the Markets" consists in the imaginary expression of what the Master articulates in the Symbolic. The Master no longer is, and has not been for a while, an embodied subject, but an "anonymous" discourse, an increasingly anonymous one. Unlike the G-d of the Bible, its name is not unsayable, but like G-d, even if it doesn't have a face, it addresses its subjects to tell them that they are (or should be) at its image. I alluded above to a superegoic dimension: the subject is indeed pushed to "dare", "succeed", "always have more", "surpass herself", "break boundaries", "go beyond", and she could only feel guilty of having failed, not having succeeded at seizing the object that this impersonal authority offers her and imposes on her for her own jouissance [33].

In this way objects fulfill a double function in which the market and the drives converge. The former pushes for a permanent consumerism of constantly renewed objects, ever growing obsolete-disposable-replaceable, whereas the latter, inasmuch as no object can really fulfill the drive, requires that new objects fascinate the subject by imaginizing the phallic fulfillment that would mask its lack-in-being. In that sense, it absolutely does not mean that there is an evacuation of the phallic function, but rather its exacerbation on the imaginary side, narcissistic, like a sort of attempt, always failing yet always renewed so as to turn $-j$ (minus phi) into a positive.

The above developments, I hope, may clarify why I consider that social changes should not be mechanically transferred, transposed, to changes in subjective structure. Accordingly, I find it necessary to specify what is called "historic forms of the unconscious". The unconscious is certainly the discourse of the Other (Lacan); from this perspective, and if we accept that culture represents figures of the Other, it is not wrong to consider that social and cultural changes *impact subjectivity*, only if a fact is not neglected, that the unconscious possesses structural characteristics independent of "*contents*". This is the point I once criticized [34] regarding the similarity of Lebrun and Melman with the cultural movement of the 1940's and 1950's [35]. There is a risk in considering these social changes as factors producing "new" subjects (and therefore "new" pathologies), whereas these changes only produce "effects of subjectivity" [36]. In my perspective, these effects are different ways of confronting that which subjects have always confronted: lack and jouissance.

On the Father

Let's pause briefly to evoke a key point among the current upheavals, that of the place and figure of the father. I will limit my remarks to four short ones.

First, Lacan's criticism, so often relayed, regarding the decline of the father, is not and has never been about the decline of the paternal function, but the *decline of its imago*, which is a radically different thing altogether. Besides, it is difficult to conceive why, if Lacan had considered the paternal function escheated, he would have furthered and elaborated—as he did—his fundamental re-reading of the Freudian Oedipus (between 1955 and 1957) in terms of paternal metaphor. He even took care later on to emphasize that he

only ever spoke of Oedipus in those terms [37].

My second point proceeds from the previous one: setting up Oedipus in terms of functions of a metaphor, as Lacan does, enables the disassembly of the imaginary little story exclusively articulated around the imago of the father in the patriarchal family. In other words: In Oedipus, *it is about places filling functions beyond dramatis personae*. Oedipus and the paternal function [38] as function of operators of the double difference, that of generation and sex, remains operative even now, but with different configurations.

Third remark: Lacan's last developments on Oedipus, especially in his seminar RSI where the fourth ring of the knot functions as the Name-of-the-Father configuring Oedipus, seems to go in the direction [39] outlined in the previous paragraph. He clearly shows how the structure can hold with different knottings [40], that need be understood as metaphors of possible configurations of the structure.

Fourth remark: this whole movement is registered in the current context of modifications and transmutations of the forms and functions of the family. On this topic, it is interesting to refer to anthropologists [41] whose work unveil the mutations of forms of the family and of forms of family transmission at different historical and social times, but always with the same constant of "reproducing the social by the social". I believe that the current mutations of the family need be observed within this perspective of change, while realizing that neither the forms of the family nor the place of children within it have remained identical throughout history. From there, I can assert that what we are witnessing is not the catastrophic disappearance of the father, but rather the disappearance of a historically and socially obsolete form of the father and parenthood, with the emergence of another form neither completely new nor completely different, but of which it is so far difficult to assess the effects; effects that psychoanalysts can only record and not anticipate [42]. Children today are not the children of the 1950's, who in turn were not those of the end of the 19th century or of the 18th century [43].

As a last stab, I wish to add that human reproduction does not escape from the norms and commands of the current form of the Master's Discourse; from this point of view, and with the mingling of techno-sciences, the parental function also emerges strained (albeit partially) by the commands of the market law (sperm "banks", uterus "for rent", genetic manipulation, even—imaginary—attempts to modify the sexual real).

On the Subject of Hyper Modernity and Some Stakes for Civilization

Indubitably, a major upheaval has been impacting civilization in all its aspects for the past few decades. Whether globally or individually, whether socially, scientifically, technically or ideologically, or with regard to the stage of representations framing a "reality" referred to as "human". These deep changes, these major upheavals would not have been possible without the radical developments of technique in the wide sense; a technique that results from the association of *épistémé* and *tekhné*, but that we could very well also designate as what Lacan [44] had already described in 1970 as "the copulation of the Capitalist's Discourse with science." The question, posed in their own way by J.-P. Lebrun and Ch. Melman, and manifest as the thread of this *disputatio* is: what impact, what effects do these changes in the human world and its subjects produce? As much as I share their views regarding the radical magnitude of these changes, I disagree with their reading and the consequences they draw, especially as far as subjects are concerned; called "hypermodern" by some, whereas others (like Melman) predict "new subjects" afflicted by a "new psychological economy" and "new pathologies". Of course, another question looms in the background: that of the place of psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts in this remodeled landscape.

As previously seen, the subject's submission to the superegoic command of the current S1 lures the subject into thinking that seizing myriad objects that hypermodern society offers—an effect of the development of technique—could fill in her constitutive lack. It is of course not the case, and the subjects' wild chase for any sort of "lathouse" [45], as well as the obsolescence of objects, indicate clearly their nature of travesty and

sham. From this point of view, yes, these objects need be considered as (pseudo) fetishist solutions to castration [46]. Except that they are absolutely not a solution, but an illusion. In reality, they only are, properly speaking, temporary loincloths that need be renewed constantly, in the same way as, concomitantly, the capitalistic economy establishes a permanent consumption of new products, new objects. Should I insist on the fact that, contrarily to what is being said about the disappearance of the phallic reference, it is quite present? Better yet: it is omnipresent in the valence that the discourse (“consume and enjoy”) grants to the consumption, the use, and the “orthopedics” of objects?

In fact, this discourse, its extensions and its repercussions, made concrete through the “achievements” of technique and the system of production and consumption, pushes the phallic logic to an extreme limit on its imaginary slope (but this slope is hardly sustainable without the symbolic reference, no matter how rogue). The proliferation of objects beyond the obvious economical function of never ending production and consumption of “lathouses” doesn’t have any other bedrock or reason than to provide subjects with the illusion of filling up the lack (the *trompe-l’oeil* of castration, as indicated earlier). From the outset, objects are essentially waste, but in their infinite repetition they are ascribed a tremendous phallic value.

Today’s pathologies, erroneously called “new” [47], exhibit a very singular relationship to objects. As indicated, if an object creates this relationship it is because it comes to touch something very sensitive in the structure of the subject. But what? A response, at least a partial one, has been sketched for us by Freud and Lacan since the 1930’s.

In “Civilization and Its Discontents”, Freud remarked that men had forged an ideal of omnipotence and omniscience that they embody in the form of gods assumed as an ideal. Men assigned to gods all that was unattainable of their wishes, or that was forbidden: in short, everything that has to do, as emphasized several times, with the dimension of lack. Freud [48] added: “To-day he (man) has come very close to the attainment of this ideal, *he has almost become a God himself. (...) Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times. (...) Future ages will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great advances in this field of civilization and will increase man’s likeness to God still more*” (p. 91-92).

It appears necessary to assimilate Freud’s quote to another well-known one from Lacan [49]: “The mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an “orthopedic” form of its totality—and to the finally doomed armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure.” It is clear which kind of “orthopedics” these “prosthetics” provide, these “lathouses” as Lacan also called them, all these objects like extensions of bodily functions and with which the subject pretends to control a reality in which he himself is controlled[50]. The more he surrenders himself to this, the more he earns back a substantial narcissistic compensation. But with this exception, that the illusion supplied by the object is rapidly depleted, and it becomes necessary to relentlessly keep pursuing the next object, and the next, and yet again the next one. The capitalistic machine exults, and the drive digs its track in search of the lost object. This machine generates behaviors called “addictive” by constantly calling upon the lack in the subjects, by renewing constantly their need for “orthopedics”.

This well-oiled machine knows of (or rather ignores) one factor that permanently escapes its diabolical cadence, a factor always present and unpredictable: the incorrigible unconscious.

Final Remarks so as to Not Conclude

The changes that occurred in the past decades have been and still are of an enormous scope; I hesitate to call it an “unmatched scope” for, from today’s ultra technological era, it is difficult to assess the scope that the invention of the wheel, print, the steam machine, electricity, the telephone, television, asepsis, vaccines or radiology represented for their times. There is no doubt however that each one of these innovations led to major upheavals that must have then been experienced, and rightfully so, as revolutionary, incredible, unprecedented, and that they were going to, as most likely was the case, change the perception (wo)Men had of themselves and of the world around them. One can wager that, in each era, the change that presided its advent was considered of an “unmatched scope”.

It is up to the reader to wonder if the numerous and radical changes are leading, as some believe, to an “anthropological mutation”. It is for each one to judge if the current social upheavals produce a new subject, a subject that would be radically different, completely removed, for instance... from Ulysses. I am not referring to the major work of James Joyce, but to the first Ulysses, this character created by Homer 2,500 years ago, molded with all the human passions. Are we so far removed from him? Why, as we read the Odyssey today, are we still and always seduced, arrested, enchanted? Wouldn’t it be for the same reason that Freud detected the effect that “Oedipus Rex” had on its audience?

This is why I continue to think that it would be a mistake to consider that the current social changes produce a new subject afflicted with a new psychical economy and new pathologies. In no case does this mean that there is no change and that these social changes need not be taken into account. We are facing, per the language of unstable dynamic systems, a structural stability behind a phenomenological profusion.

To make myself as clear as possibly can be hoped: I am not saying there is no change or that they are of no importance. They are. I am not saying that they are not incredible and revolutionary, for they are. I am not saying that they do not produce effects that we have never seen so far *in this form*. But I argue that these changes constitute the foam of deeper streams, the cloth that covers something more fundamental, and that one should not mistake the phenomenal diversity that highly fluctuates with the structural bedrock that remains stable despite the alterations of its appearance, of its way of presenting itself. I shall open a parenthesis: among these remarks, one seems important enough to suggest for debate. It is about the use of the term “subject” which appears to have taken an unadvised magnitude and deserves a minimal epistemological reflection. In psychoanalysis, as is well known, “subject” is not a Freudian term; Freud mostly used other terms: the sick, the neurotic, the patient. It is Lacan who introduced the term “subject” as a psychoanalytical concept, but with a somewhat narrow definition. The subject is first and foremost the subject of the unconscious, the speaking subject inasmuch as “the unconscious is structured like a language”; it is the divided subject as it is divided between conscious and unconscious, between subject of the enunciated and subject of enunciation. In its most concise and clear form, “the subject is what a signifier represents for another signifier.” [51] It is to be acknowledged that this delimitation gives the term an extremely substantial epistemological reach and introduces a quite different distinction from other attempts to conceptualize it, like the “political subject”, the “economic subject”, the “subject of contemporary societies”, etc. Now, I am under the impression that, quite often, one slides from this narrow Lacanian definition of the subject to much wider ones, therefore much more blurred and inaccurate, where the “subject” would be the equivalent of a person moving in the reality of the world. This character who comes and goes, loves or hates, works, gets married, has children, votes, pays (or not) her taxes, buys objects constantly proposed to her as well as yet many other activities, is not without a connection with the subject of the unconscious, but they are not identical, far from it. Now, as stressed above, within the scope of the current form of the Master’s Discourse, i.e. the Capitalist’s Discourse embodied by the “market”, it is about “subjects” whose social discourse (“perverse”, why not?) would attempt to erase the bar (\$), that which symbolizes the divided subject. Wouldn’t it be more accurate, relying on precious etymology, to come back to the word “individual”, that which is not divided? Isn’t it this “undivided” which is represented by, not only that which resists the subject of the unconscious, but also that which represents the resistance to the major effects of subjectivity or subjectification today? Wouldn’t the Capitalist’s Discourse have this effect, through its discourse, of promoting the presence of the individual to better erase their subjective dimension (subjected to discourse, alienation and division)? Wouldn’t this be the effect of what Lacan indicated as one

of the agonistic links to the analytic discourse, when he said that one had to show “wherein it skews, deviates and resolves itself through other discourses” to conclude “This is where the analytic discourse has the duty to follow, where its misdeeds show.”[52]

Hypermodern “subjects” (or individuals?) wish themselves and represent themselves as undivided, because they are represented through a discourse, whereas it is precisely through their stalemates and their symptoms “that which does not turn round” emerges. Then, in fact, the subject is nothing but the subject of the unconscious.

Beyond the few differences with these authors’ positions that I have detailed above, the essential question remains: what Lacan called “the subjectivity of his (our) era” and the address to analysts. Readings, diagnoses and positions diverge, but all of us coincide on the fact that today’s subjects demonstrate a peculiar relationship to objects and to jouissance that intrigues psychoanalysts. As always, the only position the psychoanalyst can maintain is that of listening. Listening to subjects’ speech, listening to his era. Subjective suffering exists and needs the presence of this place to which speech is addressed, unique among all, the third party ear of the analyst. In times and in a world where what prevails is the de-subjecting mercantile relation, the negation of the singular, the flattening of speech and thought, the standardization of behaviors and discourses by a machine grinding all differences, psychoanalysis stays and remains one of the last spaces of freedom. Not of a naïve or romantic freedom, but of a lucid freedom that knows the (symbolic) price to pay, of speech and desire. This price is that of castration which implies a renouncement and a promise: “Castration means that jouissance has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the Law of desire.” [53] In an uncertain ever mutating world, where commodity and techno science spread by the Capitalist’s Discourse crush the margins of subjectivity, psychoanalysis still remains, despite all obstacles, a haven and a landmark. In this perspective, it still carries the fight for *Kulturarbeit*, for the work of the culture that humanizes. Given the current challenges, and to conclude, it may not be unnecessary to call upon two quotes. The first one is underscored by N.A. Braunstein while he recalls a quote by Hölderlin cited by Heidegger: “But where there is danger, there too grows what saves” [54]; it shouldn’t let us forget the question by way of a warning dropped by Freud at the end of “Civilization and Its Discontents”. As he highlights the dangers of destruction looming over humanity, Freud concludes “And now it is to be expected that the other of the two ‘Heavenly Powers’, eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary.” One year later, Freud added: “But who can foresee with what success and with what result?”[55]

It is now up to psychoanalysts to untiringly continue taking part in this fight, that of Lights, as Lacan reminded us.

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Translated from the French by Cécile G. McKenna

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Notes:

[1] I am speaking of a text by J. Derrida “On An Apocalyptic Tone Adopted Long Ago in Philosophy” (1984), itself a pastiche of Kant’s Opus “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy” (1796).

[2] <https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/the-21st-century-will-be-lacanian-or-it-will-be-barbarian-1/>

[3] The so often repeated “the 21st century will be religious (or spiritual) or it won’t be”; the sentence cannot be found in Malraux’ s work.

[4] I am relating here a personal exchange with Moustapha Safouan who was surprised by some analysts’ inclination to predict the future.

[5] We soon forget that between 1939 and 1945, in our civilized Europe, we counted our dead by the hundreds and the thousands *daily* (most of them civilians)–100 million in total, including 6 million murdered in nazi extermination camps that represented the height of refinement in barbarian rationality.

[6] *Kulturarbeit*, work of culture according to the Freudian phrase.

[7] Cf Lebrun (2000) italicization by this author.

[8] I do not intend to engage in a commentary of J.-P. Lebrun’s article, especially that, regretfully, it is a relatively old one (2000) that does not take into account later important developments by the author (notably his book “Ordinary Perversion” [Lebrun 2007]), or his more recent developments in which I detect his position deviating. Same thing as far as Ch. Melman is concerned: his radical positions—that I highly criticize—can be found in his work “The man Without Gravitass” and “The New Psychical Economy”. These authors, as well as others, their work and their positions will nevertheless be in the background of my following development. Lebrun, J-P. (2007). Melman, Ch., (2002 ; 2009).

[9] I am using the indicative tense to reveal the affirmative connotation of these points, but the use of this tense does not imply that I concur. Behind this indicative tense one should hear a conditional one.

[10] On this point, I notice a change in J.-P. Lebrun since he has been speaking of “current pathologies” or “the topicality of our clinic” in recent times, rather than of so-called novelty, which I consider highly debatable and that I have criticized elsewhere (cf. D. Koren. (2010)).

[11] I need to highlight a point of important difference between Lebrun and Melman, or so I think. The latter, if we follow his writings to the letter, seems to consider that psychoanalysis doesn’t have much to do anymore with these “new subjects”, whereas Lebrun wonders about the ways psychoanalysis could and

should face this new reality.

[12] Please see Lacan (1969-70/1991; 1978).

[13] See for example: K. Lorenz (1993; 1974).

* *Transl. note*: the French word “arrondissement” means *boarding* or *hailing* a ship, but the French word also contains the root “raison”, meaning *reason* in English.

[14] It will be revealed at the end that the new use of the word “individual” is not random.

[15] Changing; I couldn't say: evolving.

** *Tranls. Note*: “Dispositif” in French.

[16] Please refer to the—in my opinion—essential work of Néstor A. Braunstein. (2014). *Malaise dans la culture technologique – L'inconscient, la technique et le discours capitaliste*. Paris: Le bord de l'eau.

[17] Note that this statement evokes the capitalist's discourse in its relationship with science, as I will further demonstrate.

[18] Pierre Macherey (2014).

* “Appareils” in French, not “dispositifs”.

[19] The italicization is this author's. This “coercion under insidious forms, gentler” was already announced in the 19th century by Alexis de Tocqueville. (1840/1986); specifically, in chapter VI “Which despotism should democratic nations fear” and particularly pp. 434-435.

[20] Néstor A. Braunstein (2014).

[21] See on this topic, J.-P. Lebrun's theses on the disappearance of the transcendental dimension founding the norm which leaves subject escheated, as well as, as already pointed out, the central thesis that makes the social the matrix of the subject. Ch. Melman is even more radical, as per his thesis on the New psychological economy.

[22] For instance, in the configuration of the family structure.

[23] I say "as formatted" because subjects have always been formatted. In the Middle Ages for instance, it was the Church that "gave shape" to subjects, to their social behaviors and their representations of "reality".

[24] In the following paragraphs I will indistinctly use "Capitalist's Discourse" and "Market's Discourse". There is no antinomy, the second being for me the phenomenal façade of the first one. It is different from Braunstein's proposition of a Markets' Discourse that he considers structurally different. Cf. the entire last section of Néstor A. Braunstein. (2014).

[25] The 1972 conference at the University of Milan. For heuristic reasons, I find it necessary in my reading of Lacan, to put into perspective his hapaxes, those unique times where he put forward formulations he never returned to later. A number of them are known.

[26] In other words: it is not the master's Discourse that is in crisis.

[27] Statement he had already made in his seminar "The other side of psychoanalysis".

* *Transl. Note: the Capitalist's Discourse*

[28] *Fascinum*: both an enchantment and an evil spell. Pascal Quignard rightfully stresses that the Greek word "phallos" is "fascinus" in Latin (p. 9). In P. Quignard (1994). (I thank N.A. Braunstein for this apropos reminder)

[29] In *Civilization and Its Discontents*; I will get back to the "prosthetic" question later.

* *Transl. Note: foreclosure*

[30] Miller, J.-A. (2011). J. Lacan, Conférences à Sainte-Anne, 6 décembre 1972 [J. Lacan. Conferences at Saint-Anne, December 6, 1972]. In *Je parle aux murs—Entretiens de la chapelle de Sainte-Anne [I Speak to the Walls—Conversations at Sainte-Anne Chapel]* (p. 96). Paris: Seuil.

[31] J.-P. Lebrun’s formula flourished! However, J.-P. Lebrun speaks of “ordinary perversion”.

[32] “... the capitalist’s discourse is something insanely ingenious, but doomed to fail (...) it is unbearable (...) it works like clockwork, it cannot work better, but that’s it, it is working too fast, it consumes itself, it consumes itself so well that it burns up.” Lacan (1972). Retrievable from <https://ecole-lacanianne.net/bibliolacan/pas-tout-lacan/>

[33] “Transgression” could indicate a “perverse” trait, except that subjects only obey the summon of S1.

[34] D. Koren (2010).

[35] With E. Erikson, E. Fromm, or K. Horney.

[36] I am borrowing this expression from F. Chaumon (2009).

[37] “I therefore spoke at this level of the paternal metaphor. I have only ever spoken of the Oedipus complex in that way.” Lacan (1969-70/1991).

[38] The paternal function might henceforth be better served if referred to as “function of the third” or “function of separation”.

[39] “The symbolic is needed so that what may appear, individualized in the knot, is this something that I do not call the Oedipus complex; it is not that complex after all. I call it the Name of the Father.” *Translated from J. Lacan (1974-75), session of April 15, 1975.*

[40] “Knotting differently, this is what constitutes the Oedipus complex, and it is precisely that which analysis operates itself.” *Translated from J. Lacan. (1974-75), session of January 21, 1975.*

[41] I am thinking particularly of Maurice Godelier (2004).

[42] Except through their own prejudice.

[43] Even the idea, the representation that we have of (wo)Man is in a way a recent “invention”. Please look into the very last page of the book by M. Foucault. (1966). I insist: the representation, not the structure. *Transl. Note: Foucault, M. (1966/1970).*

[44] “To see it we haven’t had to wait for the full development of the Master’s Discourse for it to reveal its astute last word in the Capitalist’s Discourse and its curious copulation with science.” Lacan (1969-70/1991) p. 126. I am excluding the adjective “curious” (the “curious copulation”). What is curious is that Lacan considers this “copulation” curious *whereas it is rather necessary.*

[45] Lacan invented “lathouse”, a neologism created from a play on Greek words—*Lethe* (oblivion) and *Aletheia* (truth)—to indicate the consumer object. “The world is more and more populated with lathouses (...) tiny *small a* objects that you will find whenever you step out, here on the pavement, at each street corner, behind any shop window, in the abundance of those objects made to stir your desire, provided that science now rules it [your desire], think of them as lathouses (...) the lathouse has no reason to limit its proliferation.” Lacan, J. (1969-70/1991) pp. 188-189.

[46] Marx’s comments on the fetishistic feature of commodities should be remembered.

[47] All these “pathologies” (I will never be able to insist enough on the use of the expression “subjective position” as much more accurate) have been known for a while, since the “limit states” or “borderline” (A.

Stern, 1938), like the so-called “narcissistic” pathologies since the 1940’s. As for the “adhesive” relationship to objects, they are no different in their essence from what Anglo-Saxon authors used to call “pregenital traits”.

[48] Italicized by this author. In S. Freud (1927-1931) pp. 57-146.

[49] Italicized by this author. In J. Lacan (1966/2006) p. 78.

[50] See Braunstein (2014), the long and fundamental chapter on “servomechanisms”.

[51] Lacan (1961-62).

[52] Lacan’s response to a contribution by M. Safouan on “The real Father” (1972).

[53] J. Lacan (1966/2006) p. 700.

[54] N.A. Braunstein (2014), p. 37. Heidegger’s quote can be found in “Sérénité” (Heidegger 1968) pp. 38-39.

[55] Freud (1930), p. 145.

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