

This paper has been inspired by two instances... one a question that has occupied me for most of my life and two a statement by Lacan.

What could be a narrative for the 21st century that could lead to a different social bond that is not based on rivalry, the exponential depletion and exponential pollution of our habitat?

And Lacan's preface to Sem XI

I AM NOT A POET,BUT A POEM .

A POEM THAT IS BEING WRITTEN, EVEN IF IT LOOKS LIKE A SUBJECT.

LACAN, PREFACE SEM XI

This preface was written between Sem 23 and Sem 24 on 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1976 and added to sem XI (1964) thereby re-interpreting the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis including the drive. <sup>1</sup> It was Lacan's way of introducing his later teaching into seminar XI

I AM NOT A POET,BUT A POEM .

A POEM THAT IS BEING WRITTEN, EVEN IF IT LOOKS LIKE A SUBJECT.

And while this poem is being written, something satisfies itself ....

In this presentation I would like to focus on the nature of the present and the responsibility/place of psychoanalytic practice in this unprecedented time of transition. How can a practice that engages radical singular subjective positions participate in the collective tasks we face today?

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<sup>1</sup> May 1976 is between [Seminar XXIII: The Sinthome or Joyce and the Sinthome: 1975-1976: beginning on November 18th 1975 : Jacques Lacan](#) ( See [here](#)) & [Seminar XXIV : 'L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre' : 1976-1977 : begins 16th November 1976 : Jacques Lacan](#)

How to think psychoanalytically of the deeply felt unease of so many of us?  
How does the subject keep a relation with his fellow man and language while  
at the same time keeping a relation with jouissance?

I would thus like to explore the notion of the possibility of choice for the  
subject. This notion of choice and the possibility of choice is a very poignant  
matter at this moment while humanity is facing its biggest challenge to date.

Society finds itself at a crossroads today. A point of no return. Because of  
climate change, humanity itself is threatened with extinction. This paper will  
not concern itself whether climate change is man-made or a natural occurring  
phenomenon. It is concerned with our ability to respond to the challenges that  
are facing our world today.

Do we understand how much trouble we are in? Do we understand that the  
devastating effects of climate change with its water and therefore food  
shortages will not only threaten the survival of our constitutional democracy  
but our very survival as a species? Or do we still think that the scientists are  
overstating it and that we will be able to handle nature as long as we do our  
(technological) best? We are now wrestling with real moral quandaries  
associated with the unbridled technological developments and income/wealth  
inequality in the name of corporate capitalism. We simply have to note that  
short term gains are incompatible with the long term approach that is needed  
today.

What is really happening today?

Our democratic representation is being made impotent by gross and deliberate  
misinformation of the electorate. Just last week the government cynically

produced a technicality of a money order to stop TD's debating and voting on a climate emergency bill to keep fossil fuel in the ground and issued instead oil and gas drilling licenses to Exxon Mobile and a Chinese company....

This has resulted in a society governed by fear, anxiety and impotence and an expectation of powerlessness as we have seen by the rise of the extreme right. Our society governed by law, order and a democratic distribution of power is being challenged today as we have seen in Turkey, Hungary and in all places in the US. In times like this it is reasonable to expect the worst rather than to go on hoping for the best?

It would be a mistake to think that populism is nothing but a passing aberration of the democratic system. It is in fact a structural symptom of democracy since votes can be gained by appealing to the most primal impulses of the individual with huge electoral costs for those who refrain from doing so.

Anyone who has ever had a relationship knows: trust, once it is lost, is the hardest thing of all to repair. Will we move to a society where democratic power is taken away from the people and concentrated in (the most ruthless, vicious, brutal and inhumane) corporations? What will we do when no more water comes out of the tap? Three dry summers in a row could do that. Industry and agriculture are already arguing who would be the first and especially the last in a water shut down plan? Are ordinary people going to solve this with tankers, jerry cans and buckets? We all know that this is about the limits of the free market and the failing of neo liberalism (=capitalism run wild). The discourse of neoliberalism has run into its limit and has set us on a course of self destruct. Where did we ever decide that economic growth is the most important thing that politics has to deal with? What we now consider progress is only about material needs. This society's symptom can be identified

as an addiction to a growing GDP. (**Gross domestic product (GDP)** is a monetary measure of the market value of all the final goods and services produced in a specific time period, often annually.) We have reached, no exceeded the social and ecological limits of this. We need new signifiers of progress on which to create a social bond based on togetherness and respect; a social bond that allows for the feeling of being part of a community over which we can also exert influence.

Europe while trying to safeguard the democratic constitutional state, is now squeezed in a competition with major powers over resources and how to manage them. Climate change and its consequences has the potential to produce an acute collective rupturing of the signifying chain, throwing us in a collective subjective emergency.

For a Lacanian reading of the impasse our society finds itself in, we need to identify the structural point of the social symptom that is being fragmented. Where is the loss situated? What is being recuperated and how? The loss is often a loss of a real or perceived jouissance, misrecognized as 'it was better in the past' and experienced as the fragmentation of the community to which we belong even though for the speaking being the loss is located at the level of being of language, of being a speaking being. The common response is to fabricate a stranger/foreigner who is charged with all the evil and which we are going to manage through annihilation.

A conversation must be conducted and difficult choices must be made.

Choice is not free will. Choice is the result of a structural tension. If a choice is made, the tension however momentarily reduced is maintained. Choosing involves the drive and is therefore intimately concerned with a satisfaction.

This satisfaction is not necessarily available to consciousness and has not necessarily the well-being of the agent at heart. Sometimes the most deceptive is when one thinks that one chooses what one wants. Lacan emphasises in the preface to Seminar XI, that the satisfaction inherent in the drive carries with it an urgency. There is an urgency of satisfaction.

Something satisfies itself but it is not I who is satisfied.

Through psychoanalytic practice, we come to understand that our conscious intent has very little effect on what we actually do. The unconscious is precisely the distance that exists between our actions and our understanding of their meaning. We know that something rules the roost and it is not I. We find ourselves doing what we do not want to do even though we think of ourselves as autonomic beings. We act as owners of our body over which we believe we have authority. It is at the core of our deep-seated feeling of self as the person in charge of our destiny. However this everydayness illusion is now deeply challenged. The disturbance of the Earth's systems and how we contributed to this disturbance will have ramifications that might well be beyond our capacity to manage because the change will not be linear nor gradual. The tipping point is likely to remain more or less invisible until we have passed it. We could see changes of state so abrupt and profound that no continuity can be safely assumed.

Will we continue to be able to make sense of the world we have created, make the necessary collective choices and accept the loss inherent in these choices? This is not straightforward.

In his article 'logical time and the assertion of anticipated certainty, Lacan demonstrates that the moment to conclude, the conclusion is an act but it is an act founded on/precipitated by a lack of knowledge. It is in the act that a

knowledge reveals itself. You act and then you know. The knowledge comes from the act itself, from the choice itself. Inherent in every choice is a loss. It is that which makes choosing so difficult for the neurotic. In choosing he consents to a loss. You choose, you lose something in the choice and from there you extract the knowledge of what that choice is. It is the loss that tells you what you have chosen.

In other words, when we have a rupturing in the signifying chain, we need to rely on a knowledge that has not yet been produced but a knowledge that nevertheless pushes us to act in a forsaken way. Lacan in his paper explains this dynamic masterfully. He demonstrates the ability of the speaking being to rely on rational deduction while at the same time demonstrating that there is a hole in knowledge that pushes us towards an act that will only produce its truth value in a retroactive way.

In the coming years, difficult choices will have to be made if we are going to address the climate emergency, security and border control and the demands that an aging population puts on our active generation.

Can we address our addiction to a growing GDP and redefine what we consider 'quality of life'? We will need to address our addictions on both a singular and collective level if new policies are going to get off the ground that mobilize a sense of community. It goes without saying that we must invest large scale in education and sustainable development. And we will have to address the

symptom of GDP and a society structured around the market to a society based on the values that we consider important. These values must be reflected in the choice of foreign companies that we want to do business with here. " How do we lodge such a desire within a community given that for psychoanalysis, the individual cannot be reduced to its bio, psychosocial determinants because there is a jouissance at work that resists easy classification. The jouissance at stake is always singular and therefore the passage to the act is also the singular response to a situation that is unbearable for the subject. How to address this tension between a singular jouissance and the collective choices that need to be made?

How to produce a system of governing that does not regress to a discourse of racism and violence and does not generate panic? It is the case that psychoanalysis operates and intervenes at the level of singular subjects but will this be enough? What is the discourse that would allow for a place to be created for that which does not work not only at the level of the one by one but at the level of society? Psychoanalysis for its very survival depends on a society/social bond where there is tolerance and free speech. Psychoanalysis does not look for the cause of aggression in a hostile situation but in the subject. What does he do with it?

We need to urgently revisit our fundamental questions.

Who am I?

What am I doing here?

Can I control my destiny?

What could be the new discourse?

We need a new basis for identity.

The answer to the question of who am I will have to include myself as an emergent property of an eco-system, the accidental support for actions which are greater than I. It does not work to optimize my quality of life over your quality of life particularly if my quality of life endangers most species on this planet.

Our search for knowledge will have to exceed reason and logic to include the drive because what we are facing now exceeds logic and reason. The answer to the question 'Can I control my destiny?' will have to include the knowledge that the power of man is both infinitely greater and smaller than his destiny.

How do we promote social change in an ethical and effective manner in a large number of people to have results at the level of the real? As psychoanalysts we might urgently need to revisit Lacan's four discourses and revisit our modes of educating, governing, desiring and analysing.

Jacques Borie puts it this way, "For the analytic discourse to happen, it is necessary that the other discourses – which in their own way are regulating the treatment of jouissance, hold their places, so that from their impossibility appears a remainder, the waste of which we fashion our object. At this moment we are experiencing the erosion of the institutions that protect us. The university discourse is under threat in US, Brazil, Hungary, Turkey to name but a few. Our education system is but one example of our institutions not holding firm.

Psychoanalysis understands that racism is structural. Since the fundamental subjective questions of who am I, what am I doing here, and can I control my



destiny cannot receive a definite answer, the subject is sustained in the transference by the community to which he belongs. A community is constituted around a style of enjoyment that is shared/allowed and permitted. This identity formation can easily be mobilized against the stranger, the foreigner by power hungry politicians. The other becomes and represents the thief of jouissance. It is not so much that the other enjoys differently but that the other enjoys at my expense.

The paradoxical dangerous fix humanity finds itself in at this time, is that the subject is the instrument or the incidental support for an action which is great than itself while there is at the same time no master who can direct his action. This condemns the subject to a radical subjective responsibility for his response to something for which the reigns are not in his hands.

However it is necessary to make the crucial distinction between the radical subjective responsibility that emerges at the end of an analysis and accountability of the individual promoted by neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism is an economic ideology that has succeeded in taking over our identity by inviting us through advertising and the use of the media to live our 'individuality' as much as possible. In practice, this means that we all buy the same largely superfluous things, eat the same mass produced food and do the same forms of relaxation, collectively work harder, followed by the same kind of vacation that we then broadcast on the same kind of facebook page while we increasingly get more and more insidiously excluded from public education and health care. Neoliberalism succeeds into seducing us into thinking that by doing this we are unique.

Neo liberalism is fundamentally incompatible with psychoanalysis.

How to give people the opportunity to express and put into action their judgement on the main problems of public life? What is or can be a political movement that is not contaminated by party politics or propaganda? How when questions are being put to the people in the form of referenda, how can one prevent them from being misled by party politics as we have seen with disastrous results in US, UK and Brazil.

The unconscious is a relation, subjectivity is a relation, transference is a relation and this relation is theorized by Lacan via topology. The essence of a topological relation is that even though shape and appearance of a phenomenon might change there is no structural difference between any of its appearances. Moreover a topological figure is formed around a structural hole. Each change in any of the positions affects change in all of them without structurally altering them. The subject is constituted in and through the other. When we affect a change on the one, we affect a change on the Other. But... as JAM remarks 'Let us not fool ourselves, "the more things change, the more they remain the same," but they change anyway'

Marlene French Mullen