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Lacan's fifth Discourse, introducing the Capitalist Discourse

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Abstract

The four discourses introduced by Lacan, namely the master's discourse, the University discourse, the hysteric's and the analyst's discourses are well known. However, Lacan introduced a fifth Discourse in the 70's that has not been as extensively discussed as the previous four. The aim of this essay is to introduce and to explain as clearly as possible Lacan's matheme of the Capitalist Discourse starting by first clarifying the general principles of logic structuring the fundamental matheme of Discourses and particularly that of the master's discourse. Lacan presents the Capitalist Discourse from a psychoanalytic standpoint, in relationship to the concept of language, divided subject and topologically binding, in a particular logic, the subject's internal world with the social.

Lacan's 5th discourse, introducing the Capitalist Discourse

Commenting on the Capitalist Discourse, Declerq (2006) explains how the libidinal bond elaborated in the capitalist discourse comes to be organized around the object and no longer around the subject, leading in the end to a lack-of-enjoyment.

Describing the antisocial consequences of this discourse, according to this author, depression can be understood as an effect of the discourse, a discourse in which everybody becomes a proletarian. Explaining further how the neurotic subject lives within the discourse, he follows Lacan in claiming that the subject ceases to be an agent as it is conceived psychoanalytically in Lacan's discursive logic (Lacan, 1991). However, and remarkably enough, the Capitalist Discourse is not just a notion in which discourse is to be understood in philosophical or sociological terms but is conceived by Lacan as some order of logic, a *matheme* that can be added to the already well known four discursive *mathemes*, those of the Master's Discourse, the University Discourse, the Discourse of the Analyst and the Discourse of the Hysteric. Lacan has said very little about this 5th discourse throughout his seminar and until fairly recently, it is as if the *matheme* of the Capitalist Discourse had been left over or set aside from the usual and general psychoanalytic concerns among Lacanian circles and others. Even in France, although references to the Capitalist Discourse are significantly more common, it is still as if there was something to be read

between the lines, namely as if one could sense a certain reluctance or maybe modesty or again a certain cautiousness to address it directly. It might be plausible to speculate that those who are well acquainted with this discourse, on account of Lacan's claim (Roudinesco (1997) that Marx had enabled capitalism to acquire its identity, may be reluctant to enter into an open critique of capitalism that could be construed as merely ideological and therefore threatening in some ways to the complex yet characteristic position taken by psychoanalysis in regard to socio-political considerations.

Nevertheless, to address this discourse certainly would have consequences in term of considering the Subject and subjectivity in this culture. Therefore it is the purpose of this paper to introduce this 5th discursive matheme and its derivatives but to do so in the least speculative manner, that is to say by presenting the basic elements organizing Lacan's discourses necessary to grasp the specific changes introduced by the Capitalist Discourse. However, the larger aim of this paper, rather than to be exhaustive, is solely to introduce the matheme of the Capitalist Discourse in minima as a starting point of research, namely as an opening statement rather than a conclusive one.

Lacan (1991) introduces the four discourses and the discursive logic they constitute in the aftermath of the political events in France of 1968 in the seminar, *The Other side of Psychoanalysis, l'Envers de la psychanalyse*, between 1969 and 1970.

Accordingly, a discourse is understood as a logical expression or in other terms as a discourse without words, *un discours sans parole*. It comes to be expressed as a play

of letters whereas each variation of this play of letters represents a social bond. These representations constitute the discursive algorithm professed by Lacan.

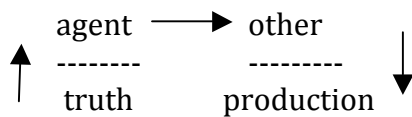
The discursive algorithm

What is this algorithm? Or In other words, what is this “failure of intersubjectivity” to use Lesourd’s (2006) expression for a discourse. The basic invariant structure of the algorithm is constituted of four terms (Lacan, 1991; Leres, 1999; Lesourd, 2006; Beucké, 2009) each term taking one of four positions. The first position is the position of the agent that is to say the position of the one speaking and determining things and events with his words. The second position is the position of the other, namely the position of the one whom the agent addresses insofar as the other is moved by the agent’s word. The third position is the position of the product or production or again the position in which the effect of the discourse can be represented insofar as it is the result of what the agent says as well the work of the other. These three terms can be represented in a linear relationship to one another with the following series: agent → other → production.

The fourth position is the position of the truth. This position, the truth, while issued from the discourse is also the very position that determines and constitutes this discourse. It is both cause and consequence and as such it addresses the discourse’s pertinence. Also, the position of truth is necessary to the elaboration of the function of speech, *parole* (Leres, 2009) insofar as this fourth term introduces the psychoanalytic perspective that is to say the subject of the unconscious, \$.

Consequently, this fourth term should be considered fundamental (Verhaeghe, 1995), as it divides the agent who is then no longer solely the intentional agent or we could say, as it makes the agent no longer the master in his own house.

We can now associate all four terms and write the following basic series, truth → agent → other → production. More precisely, the following matrix can represent the four terms and their respective positions and relationships:



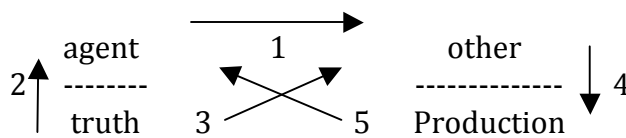
In this matrix, arrows or vectors indicate the orientation and direction of the relationships between the terms. Thusly, they organize the four discourses and this organization corresponds with the schematization of Aristotelian propositional logic (Lesourd, 2006). As such, the orientation of these vectors is paramount and cannot be altered providing in this way a certain rigor to the relationship between terms. This must seriously deserve our attention and consideration as some authors, occasionally, either introduce vectors where there ought to not be (Sauret, 2009), therefore altering the logic of association between terms according to Lacan's diagrams or simply radically misunderstand Lacan's use of vectors (Bryant, 2008), altering not only the directions of vectors but also the terms themselves. This is an important point because it addresses the stability, in a logical sense, of the four discourses and as a matter of fact and consequent to such orientation invariance, what will come in the position of truth cannot be modified at will. Such invariance in

consequence will allow each discourse to aspire to its own ethics (Beucké, 2009) or to some ethical consistency.

Therefore, the following relationships constitute the fundamental logical structure of Discourse: agent → other, truth → agent, truth → other, other → product, product → agent.

In a narrative form, Lesourd, (2006) explains this circuit between vectors as follows, “The one speaking addresses himself to the other (arrow 1) from the truth sustaining the speaker unconsciously (arrow 2). This truth, through the various symptoms of daily life (slips of the tongue, parapraxes, etc.), but also through pathological symptoms, also addresses itself, although indirectly, to the other (arrow 3). The other, then, responds to the subject with a production that can be other than linguistic (arrow 4). The produced effect then returns to the discursive agent (arrow 5) and the circuit starts again.”

This narrative can be now represented as follows:



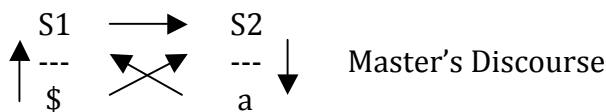
Although they do so by disrupting the discursive structure; two elements of disjunction come to organize the discursive circuitry.

According to Verhaeghe (1995), there is first a disjunction of impossibility between the agent and the other (or in other terms between S1 and S2), whereas “... the agent, who is only a make believe agent, is driven by a desire which constitutes his

truth; this truth cannot be completely verbalized, with the result that the agent can never transmit his desire to the other; hence, a perfect communication with words is logically impossible.” Thus communication between subjects is always a failure, much to the great benefits of poets, songwriters and all others; and for this author to claim that each of the four discourses will unite a group of subjects through a particular impossibility, through a particular intersubjective failure. Lesourd (2006) expresses this impossibility, i.e. this intersubjective failure, in the following terms: “The first element is the following, namely that the other is included in the discursive phenomenon as a partner of the subject and not as a subject of discourse. Indeed, human communication is not an equal exchange between two individuals but is a discourse in which, the subject speaks to another constructed by the subject himself; that is, even if this other can be represented by a peer. Communication therefore is not inter-subjectivity between two subjects. In a discussion between two persons, subject A, let’s call it “I” addresses a subject who is not subject B and that we will call “you” who answers A in reality but truly answers to the other of his discourse. The whole dynamic of misunderstanding characteristic of intersubjectivity comes from this particularity of the discursive structure. “I” does not speak to “You” and when “You” answers to this “I,” it is not to this “I” that “You” addresses. This is what Freud discovered in transference, namely the one to whom I speak is an internal other, the other of its own discourse, not the other of reality. This is what Lacan articulates, in his teaching, with the construction of schema L.”

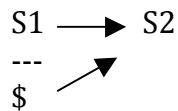
The second disjunction, according to Verhaeghe (1995), is characterized by an inability of the product to match, so to speak, the truth. This is encountered in the distance between the position of production and the position of truth. Indeed this author explains, “The product, as a result of the discourse of the other [other → production], has nothing to do with the truth of the agent [truth → agent].” Thus there can never be a relation between production and truth. The object always fails in reconciling with the truth. This inability is another consequence of a failure of intersubjectivity that constitutes the human being in language and in effect, the production always fails in reaching the dimension of truth leaving the production (the object) cleaved (\$ // a).

Lacan first introduces the Master’s Discourse, which “... takes into account the subjective determinations from language as well as the impossible access to the object of desire for any human subject, once he has entered language” (Lesourd, 2006).



In the matheme above, we find S1 in the position of agent, S2 in the position of the other, a in the position of production and \$ in the position of truth. But more specifically, on the top line, we find the relationship between S1 master signifier representing the subject \$ and knowledge S2. This illustrates very well Lacan’s claim

that a signifier comes to represent the subject for another signifier (Lérès, 1999, Lesourd, 2006):



Moreover, as we can see, the Formula of the fantasm can be found in the relation (terms below the line) between \$ and a, namely in the formula represented by the expression \$ <> a, in which the subject is forever separated from the object that would supposedly insure full jouissance (second disjunction described above). This can be illustrated by following the vectors indicating the circulation across all four positions; there is always a point when such circulation ceases, thereby introducing failure, albeit a generative failure that keeps the circulation going.

By shifting the terms of the four positions to the left by a quarter turn, it becomes possible to write the remaining three discursive mathemes, in which case the next one will be the Discourse of the University, to be followed by the Discourse of the Analyst and finally by the Discourse of the Hysteric. This will conclude this succinct presentation of Lacan's algorithm organizing his psychoanalytic notion of discourse.

The Capitalist Discourse

The 12th of May 1972, in a conference in Milan, Italy entitled *Du Discours Psychanalytique*, About the Psychoanalytic Discourse and for the first time, Lacan (1978) presents the Capitalist Discourse. He will introduce this discourse only once

and will never elaborate theoretically about it. That day, Lacan drew, along the other four discourses on the black board the following matheme,



Capitalist Discourse

Along his illustration in this conference, Lacan stated,

“Then, in order to learn a bit more, indeed, on the effects of language, to learn how it determines what I have called by a name [noun] which is not quite the name [noun] whose meaning we are used to, namely the subject.

If there had been some work, a certain work performed at the right time, along Freud’s line, there might have been... in this position, in this position, which he indicates, in this fundamental support sustained by the following terms: Semblance, truth, jouissance and surplus jouissance... there could have been... at the level of production, because surplus jouissance is what produces this effect of language... there might have been within the implication of the Analytic discourse, namely a somewhat better use of the signifier as One.

There might have been... But by the way, there will not be... because now it is too late...

... The crisis [fr. *la crise*], not so much of the Master’s Discourse but of the Capitalist Discourse, which is its substitute, is now open.

Nothing is further from my mind in telling you that the capitalist discourse is something ugly, it is on the contrary something madly clever, huh?

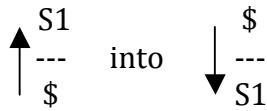
Something madly clever but bound to die off.

Because really, it's, after all, the cleverest discourse we've designed. Although it remains nevertheless bound to die off; it is in fact untenable. It is untenable in something I could explain to you... because the capitalist discourse is there, you'll see (pointing out to the formula on the board) a little reversal, simply between S1 and \$... that is the subject... it is enough for the thing to work out like a dream [in French, *Marcher comme sur des roulettes*], it cannot work any smoother, but in fact it works too fast, it consumes itself, it is consumed so well that it consumes itself. Now you are onboard... you're onboard... but there is little chance that anything serious will occur along the analytic discourse, except maybe like that, well, by chance.

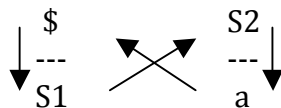
In truth, I believe that no one will speak of the psychoanalyst down the line, if I may say, of my discourse, my analytic discourse. Something else will appear, which of course must maintain the position of semblance, but still it will be... but maybe it will be called the PS discourse. A PS and then a T, it will be rightfully conforming to the way in which we claim Freud saw the importing of the analytic discourse in America... It will be the PST discourse. Add an E and it will give PEST [*Peste* in French refers to the plague], namely a discourse that would be truly finally pestiferous, entirely devoted, at last, to the service of the capitalist discourse. It might be useful, one day, for something, if, of course, the whole thing does not collapse before that."

Lacan, Milan 1972 [my translation]

In Italy, in 1972, Lacan uses the Master’s discourse as a starting point and reverses the two terms on the left, \$ and S1, while maintaining the logical orientation of the vector between the terms, namely $\$ \rightarrow S1$.



By simply doing this Lacan transforms the basic distribution of terms characteristic of the Master’s Discourse into the matheme of the Capitalist Discourse:



However, with the inversion of terms in the Capitalist Discourse the overall circuitry in the matrix will be altered. In this new situation, the subject becomes positioned in place of agent and S1 in the place of truth and if one follows the circuitry of the vectors, in contradistinction to the other four discourses, one, characteristically of this discourse, will never encounters any of the two disjunctions (impossibility and/or inability) mentioned above. The discourse is organized like an inverted “8” or ironically enough like the infinity symbol “∞;” $\$ \rightarrow S1 \rightarrow S2 \rightarrow a \rightarrow \$$, etc., as if it could go on indefinitely. The Subject, now as an undivided agent, produces the truth that leads to knowledge from which the object is produced to the subject’s full satisfaction.

Authors (Lérès, 1999; Terral, 2003; Beucké, 2009) have taken pains to clarify whether this discourse is a discourse at all, and questioned further, even if issued

from the Master's Discourse, how did the Master's Discourse mutate into the Capitalist Discourse? Hence, the mutation of the discourse of the Master of antiquity into the discourse of the industrial owner and further into the Capitalist discourse is no simple matter and remains to be elucidated in psychoanalytic terms.

In the Capitalist Discourse, unlike in the Master's Discourse, there is no vector between the subject (\$) and his knowledge (S2) and the truth no longer determines the agent but as we have seen, the other way around. Consequently, the subject usually emerging from lack in the other discourses, is reduced to being only instrumental, literally speaking, that is to say it will only be an instrument in the linear production of surplus-jouissance; $\$ \rightarrow S1 \rightarrow S2 \rightarrow a$. In becoming Master in his own house, the undivided agent becomes even more alienated since the position of truth as determinant in psychoanalytic terms (the other scene) is simply aborted by the capitalist schema or in other terms, the divided subject S1/\$ is not just excluded (as \$ was excluded from the circuitry in the Master's Discourse) it is altogether no longer taken into account. Therefore, according to this matheme, explains Terral (2003), it is possible to note that there can no longer be a dialectical relationship between the Master and the Slave. Since there is no longer a place of exception or externality (e.g. in the Master's Discourse, \$ is excluded from the circuitry $S1 \rightarrow S2 \rightarrow a \rightarrow S1$, which is short-circuited, one might say, by $\$ \rightarrow S1$ and $\$ \rightarrow S2$), or at least since no one can be exempt from this circuitry (all inclusive) and since there is no longer such a thing as a "Capitalist Master," Declerq (2006) is led to state, following Lacan, that within the Capitalist Discourse, everybody becomes a proletarian.

Accordingly there will be no signifier of lack. In this Discourse, the subject then becomes responsible and burdened to produce his own signifiers, to self-name without being subjected by any (Lesourd, 2006). Moreover, as all the positions can be reached, the discourse renders intersubjectivity seemingly possible and the two disjunctions mentioned above no longer apply as the subject can now reach the object from which he is no longer separated, the object of surplus jouissance. Now the availability of the object of jouissance to the subject will activate the phantasm in its perverse form, $\$ \rightarrow a$. In the Capitalist Discourse, the subject is no longer subjected to anything; we could say that the subject is no longer "subjectified." Lesourd (2006) further adds, "In language, the signifiers no longer name him [the subject]." Such a self-referential circuitry is certainly going to raise questions regarding fundamental psychoanalytic notions such as those of the Name-of-the-Father as well as the Father of the Name but also those of superego, ideal ego, ego ideal and their relationships. The agent, being no longer divided, can name himself (self representation, $\$ \rightarrow S1$). This author goes on to explain how, in the Capitalist Discourse, a game is set up in which an imaginary parade of absolute freedom comes to be enacted while at the same time maintaining a radical alienation from the other as container of the object ($S2/a$); on top of which, we can add the absence of disjunctions (discursive and logical failures mentioned above) that results in making the Capitalist Discourse into a discourse basically without subject or a-subjective in the psychoanalytic sense, a Discourse from which the subject is expelled, in the name of all inclusivity as we shall see. This of course leads to a paradoxical problematic namely that if a Discourse is what introduces the subject (as cause and

effect) in a social bond then can we claim that the bond determined by the Capitalist Discourse, a Discourse aborting the subject, is a Discourse at all?

If Lacan in 1972 wonders about the psychoanalyst's presence down the line, Sauret (2009) cleverly observes that if, in the Capitalist Discourse, "\$ is in the position of agent like in the Discourse of the Hysteric, S1 is in the position of truth like in the University Discourse, S2 is in the position of the worker and a in the position of product, as they were in the Master's Discourse; to tell the truth, the only Discourse which is not represented [...] is the Discourse of the Analyst... " One may ponder whether the disappearance of the subject in the Capitalist Discourse can be associated with that of the psychoanalyst?

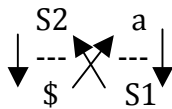
However, the crucial point, as it pertains to this Discourse, is explicated by the claim made by Lacan (1972) and quoted by Sauret (2009), that the Capitalist Discourse forecloses castration by the very fact of promising to the subject restitution of his jouissance. Such a claim, which certainly deserves to be elaborated further in the context of United States, has led French psychoanalysts to take certain theoretical positions in regard to psychopathology. Consequently, it is possible to witness in Lacanian circles and beyond the elaboration of clinical classifications defined as new pathologies that would pertain to a neo-subject or else a postmodern subject. More specifically, such new pathology has been discussed under various headings such as those of New Psychic Economy (Melman, 2002), borderline states (Rassial, 1999), ordinary perversion (Lebrun, 2007) or ordinary psychosis (Miller, 1999; Gaspard, 2010). Whether such pathology or pathologies are actually new subjective structures in Lacanian terms, new symptoms or something else altogether remains

to be clarified, as much as the discursive logic of the Capitalist Discourse ought to be further elaborated.

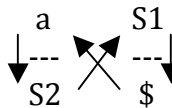
Lesourd, in 2006, went further and applying Lacan's logic of the four discourses, introduced, starting from the Capitalist Discourse, three more mathemes by rotating the terms a quarter turn to the left. In so doing, Lesourd advances the notion of Chatter, *Parlotte*, to be distinguished from the notion of Discourse. Without entering into details as it would go beyond the introductory scope of this paper, this author clarifies that Chatters cannot be called Discourse because in such matheme, the speaker and the interlocutor are not representations of the one enunciating but representations instead of utterance itself; in which case, according to him, in Chatters, subjectivity does not come into play.

Accordingly, he introduces, issued from the Capitalist Discourse, the three following mathemes,

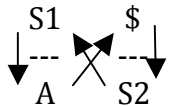
Chatter of Technology



Discourse of the Program Planer



Chatter of Ecology

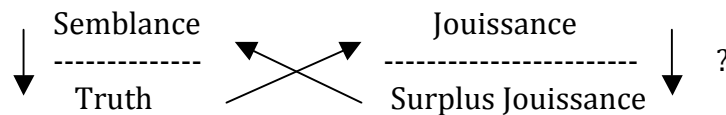


Conclusion

As one is forced to confront the relevance of the Capitalist Discourse, one is also forced to confront the fact that Lacan has left very little information about this fifth discursive matheme, thus leaving those who study his text to delve into the unknown. Given today's globalization trends, the speed of information transfers, intercultural exchanges it might be interesting, to say the least, to address this fifth matheme more substantially, especially in the United States, a culture founded on a Capitalist economy and committed to market liberalism. For, with globalization, something else is occurring, which Lacan did foresee. He stated in 1969, "Capitalism has completely changed the customs of power, these may have become abusive, in any event they have changed. Capitalism has introduced the following, something never seen before, namely liberal power" (Lacan, 2006). If there cannot be a discourse without subject, we may plausibly hypothesize that the Capitalist Discourse is bound to modify and alter subjectivity with clinical consequences. This could lead to further hypotheses and interpretation, at least clinically, regarding the growth of global liberalism, which would introduce a dialectic between this discourse and other, said traditional, discourses (e.g. the Master's Discourse as it is present throughout cultures in organizing representational life). Consequently, addressing this fifth discursive matheme would become a task not only significant from a clinical perspective but perhaps as well from a societal and global perspective. For one may ask given the Capitalist Discourse as all inclusive system, what will happen to the various social and cultural discourses or in other words, what will happen to the subject. How is the paradox introduced by psychoanalysis

going to be addressed, namely that the subject constituted from a logic of exclusion (the Other being constitutive of an incomplete, incomplete and consistent set) ends up being aborted by a logic of inclusion (in a complete, inconsistent set without Other)?

If psychoanalysis is to address this discourse, we might suggest that it will have to remain accountable in holding up its decidedly characteristic and usual, although difficult if not impossible, position that is to say, psychoanalysis will have to remain in tension between the risk of becoming obsolete and the no less risky position of transforming into an ideology of representational life, if not into an ideology of the subject.



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