

THE “DISCOURSE OF NEOLIBERALISM” AS A NEW READING OF THE CAPITALIST’S DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT: In this article we aim at updating the status of the capitalist’s discourse as first introduced by Jacques Lacan in the early 1970s, in light of the permeating trend of neoliberalism towards unlimited extension in our present-day societies. After examining the written logic of discourses proposed by Jacques Lacan, we will present the four discourses and their latest corollary: the capitalist’s discourse. We will then submit and discuss the syntagm of “discourse of neoliberalism”, by comparing it as a variant of the capitalist’s discourse. Finally, we will present neoliberalism as a reinforced Master’s discourse, so as to call it the “hypermodern Master’s discourse”.

Keywords: neoliberalism; discourse of the capitalist; jouissance; matheme; Lacan.

Resumo: O “discurso do neoliberalismo” como uma nova leitura do discurso do capitalista. Neste artigo, pretendemos atualizar o estatuto do discurso capitalista tal como introduzido por Jacques Lacan no início dos anos 1970, à luz da tendência permeável do neoliberalismo em direção à extensão ilimitada em nossas sociedades atuais. Após examinar a lógica escrita dos discursos proposta por Jacques Lacan, apresentaremos os quatro discursos e seu último corolário: o discurso do capitalista. Em seguida, apresentaremos e discutiremos o sintagma do “discurso do neoliberalismo”, comparando-o como uma variante do discurso do capitalista. Por fim, apresentaremos o neoliberalismo como um discurso de Mestre reforçado, de modo a chamá-lo de “discurso do Mestre hipermoderno”.

Palavras-chave: neoliberalismo; discurso do capitalista; gozo; matema; Lacan.

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The “discourse of neoliberalism” as a new reading of the capitalist’s discourse

*“The prospect of neoliberalism is [...] to ascertain how to regulate the global exercise of political power based on the formal principles of market economy.”¹ Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France 1978-1979*.*

“By the term of discourse [...], I call that by which, through the pure and simple effect of language, social tie is precipitated.”²

Jacques Lacan, ...*Ou pire*, Le Séminaire, Livre XIX.

In our so-called advanced societies, the enduring implementation of neoliberalism as a global civilizational policy opens a wide field of investigation for human science researchers. This civilizational phenomenon calls for ways to explain its meaning and impact not only on the social world, but also, as far as we are concerned, on subjectivity and human relationships as the main cause of suffering for man, as Freud noted in *Civilization and its discontents*³. In this article, we endeavor to take neoliberalism as a subject matter and to confront it to the psychoanalytical approach. Here we posit that human subjectivity cannot be distinguished from the social world or from societal constructs, in other words, that it is tightly woven into the collective sphere. In fact, what is most intimate within a subject invariably relates to the most political matters. The subject of language is wearing their era’s discourse as a clothing fabric, so much so that “(psycho)analysis is a matter of singularity and of acquaintance, but also of politics” (BRUNO, 2010, p. 100).

Thus, we would like to question neoliberalism as a discourse in the Lacanian lexicon, *i.e.* as the bearer and vector of social ties between two speaking, language-divided beings. This heritage from Lacan regarding discourses proves to be a precious theoretical concept when it comes to understanding social ties and analyzing the workings between isolated clinical practice on the one hand, and on the other, collective historical processes which outline each subjectivity. Considering the dominance of neoliberal doctrine and the omnipresence of its lexicon and representations in our societies, the examination of social tie through the prism of Lacan’s logic of discourses ends up being of utmost relevance. The capitalist’s discourse as highlighted by Lacan in the early 1970s seems to be the most fitting one in describing the dynamics that can be observed within the neoliberal doctrine. However, since the latter has an inherent and spectacular tendency for self-reinforcement and extension to the whole social field, we can hypothesize that we are dealing with a new variant of the capitalist’s discourse.

First we will examine the relevance of Lacan’s concept of discourse (1), and more precisely its written logic of social ties, moving to his theorizing of the four discourses (2). Third we will outline the new characteristics of the latest variant of the Master’s discourse (3), the discourse of the capitalist, under a new light. The present hegemony of neoliberalism will give us an occasion to update said “capitalist’s discourse”, sometimes referred to as the “fifth discourse”, hereby exposing how neoliberal doctrine, carried as it is by constant efforts towards globalization, consolidates the capitalist’s discourse, thus facilitating its dominance and expansion. That will prompt us to formulate a proposal by coining the term of “discourse of neoliberalism” (4).

1 DISCOURSE AS A WRITTEN LOGIC FOR SOCIAL TIES

In the late 1960s, in a context of first-order cultural, social and political turmoil⁴, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan elaborated a theory of discourses, or better said, gave them a written form aimed at formalizing the social tie between two *language-traversed* beings. In Lacan’s works, the discursive fabric is fundamentally highlighted as a subjective reality. His legacy prompts us to considerate the relevance of this “logic of discourses” with a great deal of attention, since it allows us to formalize social ties as an effect of discourse. Isolated from speech, a *discourse* is meant by Lacan as a logical representation of social tie, derived from the properties of signifiers: one subject’s S1 might well be another subject’s S2. Henceforth, discourse is a structure, or fundamental form, whose grammar is comprised in the Lacanian theory of signifiers:

In this logical representation of the discourses, the “utterance status” or S2, referred to by Lacan as the *signifier set* (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 11), represents the existing range of signifiers. S1 is the “stakeholder” who, through its own intervention, is bound to take a meaningful role inside this set of signifiers, or signifying field, that is already structured around pre-existing instances of knowledge. And “knowledge, when it speaks in and

1 FOUCAULT, M. *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France 1978-1979*. Paris: Gallimard-Seuil, 2004, p. 137.

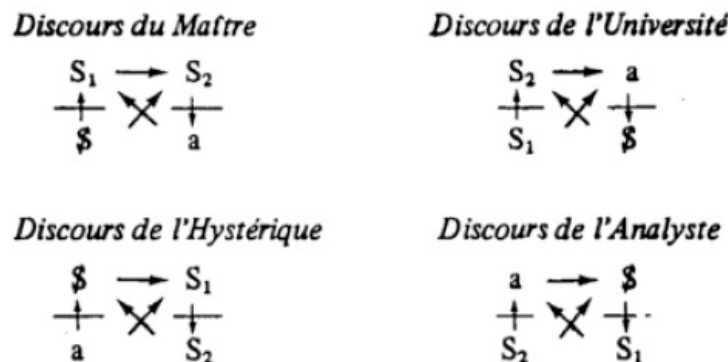
2 LACAN, J. ...*Ou pire*. Le Séminaire Livre XIX (1971-1972). Paris: Seuil, 2011. p. 152.

3 “The third menace stems from our relationships with other human beings. [...] This sort of suffering may well be harder for us to endure than any other” (FREUD, S. *Malaise dans la civilisation*. Paris: PUF, 1971, p. 21).

4 The events of May 1968 shook the foundations of France, Europe and more generally most of the Western world.

of itself, is the unconscious" (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 80).

Figure 1: the four discourses



Translation: Master's discourse, University's discourse, Hysteric's discourse, Analysant's discourse.

There are structures – we wouldn't know what else to call them – characterizing what can be understood from this *in shape of* on which I dared to lay the focus last year, *i.e.* a dynamic at work via the fundamental relationship – the one that I am defining as present between one signifier and another. That's where the emergence of what we call the Subject stems from – from the signifier which, in many instances, functions as a representation of this Subject for another signifier. (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 11).

The function of these logically-represented discourses is to fit into a gap of reality, an unknown space; their goal is not to outline or capture, but rather to "write two orders of relations" (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 217). Lacan's algebraic formula thus serves as a tool for examining and representing relational dynamics: "These more or less mobile terms: S1, S2, a, S, [...] can be useful for a wide range of relations" (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 218). Discourses are indeed a form of writing and their formulas give us a beacon around which we can now distinguish the movements and relational dynamics at play.

This written logic allows us to show a discursive structure that is essential in the formalization, management and "precipitation" (in the chemical sense) of social ties. Lacan writes: "[...] this type of structure that I refer to as *discourse*, that by which, via the pure and simple effect of language, a social tie is precipitated. That is even what we usually refer to as *ideology*" (LACAN, 1971-1972, p. 152). Each discourse is a variant of the Master's discourse, which stands as the original matrix and allows for the "round of discourses", whereby their written logic can be spun by a quarter of a circle in both directions and change form. Each of the discourses is rooted in the three others, within a tetrahedral structure. They thus form the four feet of a tetrapod, with the associated metaphorical property of stability in the discursive field.

2 THE FOUR DISCOURSES...

Under the names of Master's discourse, Hysteric's discourse, University's discourse and Analysand's discourse, Lacan pinpoints four logical discourses which account for a specific type of social tie between two language-traversed beings, each in a particular way. See Figure 1.

What is specific about the formalized form of the Master's discourse is that it deals with the trade of *governing*, known as one of the *impossible trades* since Freud and Kant.⁵ It originates from the renouncement of *jouissance*. Lacan borrows this name of Master's discourse from Hegelian dialectics, and specifically that of the Master and the slave. The form of this *matheme* bears a great deal of resemblance with the relationship between an ancient Master and their slave. Nevertheless, Lacan added something: in this *matheme* for the Master's discourse, S1 stands for the "function of the signifier on which the Master's essence is based" (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 20). The Agent, then, is assimilated to the Master signifier (S1), whereas the *Other* is the *knowled-*

5 "It almost seems like analyzing is the third of these impossible trades, in which you can rest assured, from the start, that your success will inevitably prove insufficient. The two others, which have been known for way longer, are educating, and governing" (FREUD, S. Finite and infinite analysis [1937]. OC. P, vol. XX, (1937-1939). Paris: PUF, 1985, p. 50). "[...] two human discoveries rightfully stand out as the most difficult activities: the art of governing men, and that of educating them" (KANT. E. Leçons sur l'éducation. Paris: Vrin, 2004, p. 106).

ge about *jouissance* in S2, “which is the particular space of the slave” (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 20). The Master’s attributes lie with divided subject S, whereas production is assimilated to whatever the Master subtracts from the slave, or better said, to a (lowercase) *a* object that amounts to the *jouissance-added* (LACAN, 1968-1969, p. 21). Production of this *jouissance-added* thus stems from the original renouncement of initial *jouissance*. In fact, *plus-de-jouir* in Lacan’s original French conveys an ambiguous meaning, having both the denotations of “more, enlargement” and “no more, stop”, so that the term simultaneously describes both phases of *jouissance*, flourishing and deprivation. The Master’s discourse generally aims at ordering and guaranteeing the proper functioning of society and this is done by ruling and moderating the Subject’s relationship to *jouissance* on a global scale. That moderation must be understood as an instance of drive repression by the Subject, as Freud reminded us in *Civilization and its discontents*. Renouncement of *jouissance* as a *civilizational sanction* is done via a Master’s figure in S1, commanding the S2 (representing the *other’s* or the *slave’s* knowledge), thus producing value *a*, which is unredeemably disjointed from divided Subject S, through the *jouissance barrier*. And substantially, that *balanced* regulation of *pieces of jouissance* befalls to *politics*. Hence the link between social order and the Master’s discourse, and the latter’s orientation towards civilizing devices.

The Hysteric’s discourse wants to face the Master’s discourse, because of the Hysteric’s suspicion towards the power that the Master is meant to incarnate. Not really one of the *impossible trades* described by Freud, and not really a *trade* in itself, it relates more closely to what you could name *creation of desire*. Lacan introduces the Hysteric’s discourse in reference to the Master’s discourse, for he saw the Hysteric as the source of a particular quality of social tie, in that they “convoke desire, even at the cost of fleeing the actual encounter at the level of *jouissance*” (DEMOULIN, 2009, p. 52). The Hysteric actually refuses to be taken into account in the Master’s discourse, except as a symptom. There they occupy a privileged place of dissidence. This position of freedom and distance symbolizes a protest against arbitrary or normalizing rules associated with the Master’s place. From a political standpoint, this corresponds to the aim for more democracy, as observed in worker strikes traditionally, and more recently as well in the French yellow jacket movement, the goal being to ask the Master, or at least its representative figure, to justify and/or alter their course of action.

The discourse of University – or Scholar’s discourse – serves to structure the discursive representation of knowledge. In order to boast some order of accomplishment in terms of the Master’s objectives, which amount to objectives of *mastery*, they use knowledge as an ally. In the trail of the Master’s discourse, it thus inscribes a particular dynamic of mastery of the *other*, bound to induce effects of conformity. The individuals it shapes are educated, normalized, judicious, disciplined or even obedient. This wide range of qualities may ensnare the subject into this discourse, whether they be a caring citizen or a disciplined, sheepish consumer. In the Scholar’s discourse, knowledge occupies the dominant place of reference, and although a drive for civilizing action is perceivable in it, it focuses more on dealing with learning and education. In the same vein as the impossible trade of *governing*, the discourse of University gives its frame of reference to the trade of *educating*, thus triggering effects of normalization. The hegemonic language that it bears makes it akin to the Master’s discourse, insofar as it supports the belief that acquisition of knowledge may reduce or even abolish the Subject’s division.

Last but not least, the Analysand’s discourse aims at lifting the repression imposed by the Master’s discourse. That is precisely why Lacan said, regarding the Analysand’s discourse, that it stands out as opposite to the Master’s discourse. Let us note that this “latest addition” (LACAN, 2011, p. 69) stands widely apart from the three other discourses: indeed, in the agent’s place, no signifier can be found, but rather object *a*, whose function is to presentify the Real, which Lacan describes in these terms: “When I am talking about the analytical discourse, I am not talking about something resorting from knowledge” (LACAN, 2011, p. 66). Henceforth, the goal for a subject in the Analysand’s position is to process these pieces of unknown that are let through by the “structures of the unconscious”, like dreams for instance, but also slips, subconsciously deliberate mistakes, and symptoms. The Analysand’s position is neither one of power, nor of knowledge: actually it is highly subversive in nature. In psychoanalytical treatment, via the transference relationship, the Analysand themselves can become the cause for their own desire, so much so that a question arises: what is the significance of this uttering of this subject, through the tying of a signifier to a piece of the Real, in other words, via object *a*? “One thing we know for certain, is that I was able to articulate these three discourses in the form of some kind of *matheme*, only and only because the Analysand’s discourse emerged”, Lacan said on December 2nd 1971 (LACAN, 2011, p. 66). Hence the Analysand’s discourse is required for the four discourses to form a round. Discourse number four is only valid in its relationship towards the three other discourses, and mainly towards the Master’s discourse, and stands as a counterpart to political power. By introducing these discourses, Lacan performed two actions at once, as Sidi Askofaré noted: “He founded the Lacanian field of investigation as such while highlighting the dependency of psychoanalytical discourse towards the other discourses” (ASKOFARÉ, 2013, p. 285). But what immediately strikes as a form of dependency can also be interpreted as a step back from it. In fact, the categories of the Analysand’s discourse also allowed Lacan to formalize his stance on psychoanalysis as being off-limits from

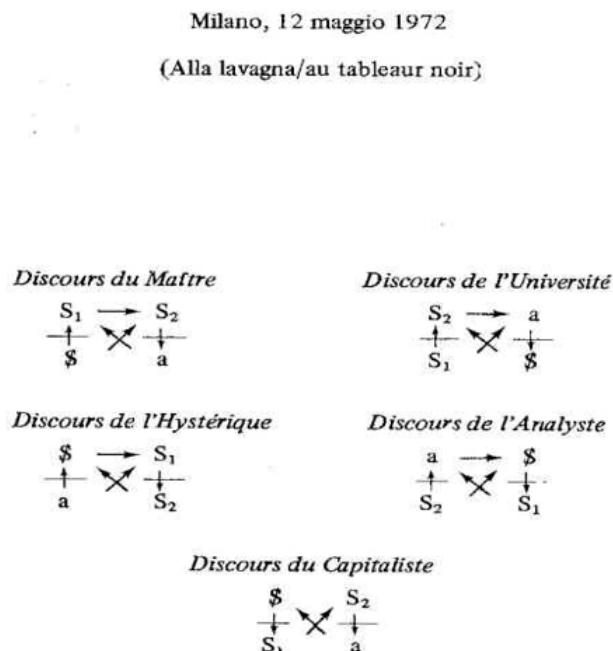
the political field, and also to substract psychoanalysis “at least partially from the scientific *Weltanschauung* imposed on it by Freud” (ASKOFARÉ, 2013, p. 286).

3 ...“PLUS ONE”: THE CAPITALIST’S DISCOURSE

In order to stress out the discursive articulations which found and organize social ties, Lacan only proposed four discourses, that can be flipped by 90 degrees, “four structures, not more, the first of which sort of indicates the initial state” (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 13). However, in the early 1970s, he ventured away from his statements by positing the existence of a fifth discourse. Indeed, to him, discourse structures were not a strictly historical reality. As he wrote in *L’envers de la psychanalyse*, “they are not the turning table of history. It does not have to happen in the same way, or to spin in the same direction” (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 217). This is precisely why the capitalist’s discourse, as last in line and as a variant of the Master’s discourse, became an option: in the logic of discourses, what is written keeps being written with.

On May 12th 1972 in Milan, Lacan wrote the *matheme* of the Capitalist’s discourse for the first and only time. What some portrayed as a fifth discourse actually should be seen as a fourth discourse *bis*, or as a mode of expression of the four former discourses, “condensed” by historical contingencies. It transcribes a variant of the Master’s discourse, or more precisely, a “substitute”, as Lacan put it (1978, p. 47). The French psychoanalyst’s intuition stems directly from the social and political conditions at the time, when the trend for acceleration of neoliberalism at work in the early 1970s and the “absolutization of the market”, prompted him to view capitalism as a civilization (LACAN, 1968-1969, p. 37). Lacan’s originality on these topics comes from the fact that he conceived the approach to social ties within capitalism, not from the standpoint of labor and economics, as Durkheim had done before him, but taking language and *jouissance* as a starting point. Doing so, he placed capitalism under the sign of culture, *i.e.* as participating form a very specific discourse. Four discourses “plus one” then: the Capitalist’s discourse stands as a substitute for the Master’s discourse and the need for a new *matheme* is justified by this “very small inversion” that you can see on Figure 2. This new logic does not reject the Master’s discourse however, but rather induces a permutation not devoid of consequences, since the Subject has become the agent. The position of the agent and the position of Truth, respectively S1 and S, have been switched, while the dynamic represented by an arrow between S and S1 remain unchanged.

Figure 2: The four discourses plus one



This small, “minute shift” occurs less on symbols than on their respective positions. The divided subject has taken the S1’s position (LACAN, 2011, p. 96). The *impossible relationship* is maintained, whereas the *barrier to jouissance* is thrown away, since the arrow from S1 to S2 disappears. The barrier of impossible jouissance, which would usually be drawn between the positions of production and of Truth, is lifted, and the dimension of *loss*, which enables desire and social ties, is gone! Here lies the singularity of the capitalist’s discourse. Supporting

this discourse based on the idea of *more* is the modern Master’s discourse, which is saturated with *Master knowledge*, as a precondition for capitalist discourse. The latter “subverts the Master’s discourse rather than simply updating it, overthrowing it without necessarily nullifying its presence”. Lacan warns:

The Master’s discourse is still standing up, again and again. You can highlight this easily enough. (...) I just showed you this little shift in a certain place which turned it into the capitalist’s discourse. It is exactly the same deal, except with a slicker design, it runs better, and you’re even more screwed. You do not even think about it anyhow. It is just like the Scholar’s discourse, you are stuck in it big time, whilst thinking you are causing some *May-jor* upheaval. (LACAN, 2011, p. 66). (Translator’s note: referring to the events of May 68).

The Master’s discourse turns out to have gotten “slicker”, and even more so as it stems from the articulation between capitalism and science: it is developing and “pronouncing its final word through the discourse of the Capitalist and its strange copulation with science” (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 126). Lacan viewed the Capitalist’s discourse as an accounting perspective towards *added-jouissance*, *plus-de-jouir*, a term he designed around Marx’s value-added, and there he defined *jouissance* in its aspect of *filling*. The *added-jouissance* amounts to object *a*. He notes that its main factor is the renouncement to *jouissance* under the effect of discourse, which “[...] allows us to isolate the function of object *a*” (LACAN, 1968-1969, p. 19). Indeed, the object as a cause for desire from a subject, is always under the effect of some lack, and thus, of some degree of renouncement. In other words, as Roland Chemama stated, “in the sphere of individual desire as well as in that of commercial economy, the system works only thanks to renouncement” (CHEMAMA, 2007, p. 127).

4 THE DISCOURSE OF NEOLIBERALISM: STRIVING TOWARDS GLOBALIZATION

What can we observe today, at a time when neoliberalism has reached the whole range of human economies? What about it now that market economy applies to each and every aspect of our existence, with no exception? The exclusive domination of neoliberal doctrine urges us to reflect upon the relevance of the Capitalist’s discourse, and to ponder whether it is justified to think of neoliberalism as a new variant of the Capitalist’s discourse. The extensive and uninterrupted spread of the neoliberal software is such today that the frame of reference of competitive markets is now gaining access to the whole social body and its institutions. Henceforth, we posit that introducing and defining the syntagm of “discourse of neoliberalism” is interesting and adequate, in order to first insist on the fact that it behaves as a project for civilization, which Lacan himself noted about capitalism. Quite like the latter, neoliberalism has to be approached as a fact of civilization, with its discursive dimension and its particular way of dealing with social ties and with the subject’s rapport to their *jouissance*.

In this day and age, capitalism of neoliberal orientation is enforced authoritatively, “stripped from its archaic references and fully meant as a historical construct and as a general norm for life” (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2009, p. 6). But before going any further in our analysis, let us make a preliminary remark which seems indispensable: neoliberalism is not a mere economic doctrine, and one would be mistaken to sum it to capitalism. In fact, neoliberalism is a complete political philosophy, meaning an attempt at governing man, which relies on a method for rationalizing government. As the dominant discourse in hypermodernity, it rules over the political structuring of our Western societies, all the while striving to apply market logic to the exercise of the Political, in other words, as Michel Foucault wrote in *Naissance de la biopolitique*, to “regulate the global exercise of political power based on the formal principles of market economy. It does not want to free a vacant spot, but to bring about, to referentiate, to project the formal principles of market economy onto a general art of government” (FOUCAULT, 1978-1979, p. 137).

Neoliberalism thus oversees our civilizational policy, almost exclusively, dealing a global, unifying, omnipresent line of thought. The heart of its philosophy produces and relays a totalizing discourse, the objective of which is now to extend the norm of generalized competitiveness to the widest reaches of human economies, and including healthcare, art, education, justice or within the University, with an inclination towards acceleration.

The term “globalization” was first used in the 1990s, “describing, in the first sense of the word, the act of making something that was ‘local’ ‘global’. Which means scaling one concept’s applications up to full-scale (possibly planetary scale)” (MORIN, 2016, p. 104). That is precisely the main activity of neoliberalism, broadcasting the concept of Market and the *company as a form* to our whole social and societal environment, in other words, to the entirety of human economies. The neoliberal ideal is a universalizing one, that we should listen to as a *world Reason* (“Raison-monde” in French) (DARDOT; LAVAL, p. 6). By the way, this universalizing tendency was what convinced us to use the term of “discourse of neoliberalism” rather than “neoliberal’s discourse”.

Globalization thus corresponds to the rule of similarity, and causes stronger and stronger effects of uniformization: sameness in *jouissance*, in individuals, in ideals etc. Neoliberal logic produces a new norm that applies not only to economic life and society, but also to our very subjective experience, from our institutions and States to our most intimate existence, by waving a new net with the thinnest threads of our Unconscious.

Neoliberalism works as a civilizing force by aiming in an ever more extensive manner towards universality. In conjunction with the apex stance of the discourse of science, it now takes the form of conformist superegos, fed with and feeding mass culture. And the more the scientific discourse extends, the more the Capitalist's discourse is heard.

5 EXTENSION, DOMINATION AND REINFORCEMENT OF THE CAPITALIST'S DISCOURSE

Rather than postulating that this is a new variant, we posit that the globalization of neoliberal philosophy is such that it facilitates the deployment of capitalism to the whole social sphere on a general scale. From its origins, the neoliberal school of thought stemmed from the Capitalist's discourse, drawing its discursive logic from it in order to write its own story. As some sort of compensation, it paves the way for its extension and domination. The logic of the Capitalist's discourse as viewed by Lacan is thus more relevant than ever. In the end, neoliberalism confirmed and seconded the Capitalist's discourse by commanding it to spread and affect a great deal of domains that were excluded from capitalism in its first, industrial form. Under neoliberal rule, capitalism has at its disposal such a political tribune that it serves as a meeting point between sectors that are always blossoming and diversifying, but not restricting itself to purely commercial scenarios.

As Lacan perfectly captured it half a century ago, the Capitalist's discourse has found its greatest trick by ensuring that the subject ends up in the agent position within the structure. The individual of neoliberalism is, now more than ever, an agent of consumption steering their own ship. In lieu and place of the Master signifier S1, they stand in a position that can be fantasized as one of *mastery*, meaning believing oneself to be subject to nothing, since the barriers of the impossible are lifted, while at the same time acting in a way that is beneficial to the market. In these neoliberal times, the individual is a *self-made entrepreneur*: not confined to the role of consumer anymore, they have become active consumers, who are led to think that they should venture into their own life, take a spot on the market, guided by their own interest, and by what they have got in store. Nonetheless, Lacan indicates, the individual in capitalism "is really a proletarian, that is to say, an individual whose desire is exploited and duped, for it is restrained to *jouissance*" (LACAN, 1974, p. 187). They are, said Colette Soler, "a subject completed with its *plus-de-jouir*" (SOLER, 1995, p. 6).

The autonomous individual, in the shape of the *self-made man* figure, is performant and competitive. They are drawn to constant affirmation of self-worth, which constitutes one of the finest finds of neoliberal technology, since it allows for the subject to be anchored in the agent position within the Capitalist's discourse. Our agent-subject is always returned to their individuality. Always pushed to follow their own modes of *jouissance*, they hold a false belief of originality, since the modalities are dictated by market offer. As a consequence, the gap between subject and object is narrowing considerably, until it falters, until it possibly disappears. Nothing is barring the way from production – object *a* – to agent – our divided Subject. We can consume, that is relevant to the imperative of enjoyment carried by the neoliberal superego, which exploits the subject's desire so intensely that *jouissance* has become limitless and unbound, only becoming a matter of consumption in lieu and place of fantasy. A sharp discourse, a "wildly daring" one, and yet:

I'm not telling you that capitalism is ugly at all, quite the contrary, it is something tremendously clever, isn't it? Tremendously clever, but prone to puncture. Well, after all it is the cleverest discourse ever produced. (...) enough so that it's going smoothly, cannot work better, but that is the problem: it's going too fast, consuming and consuming so much that it ends up consumed. (LACAN, 1978, p. 36).

6 CONCLUSION THE HYPERMODERN⁶ MASTER'S DISCOURSE: TOWARDS AND END OF THE FOUR DISCOURSES?

One half century after Lacan's "Italian intuition", what should we think of social discourse? Since then, the Capitalist's discourse has spread and consolidated so much, through the indefectible support of the economically liberal policies of hypermodernity, that today's standardization of *jouissance* is at its peak. Objects *a* from the industry overflow us and proliferate, as a host of "fake, *jouissance*-added serial products" (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 92-93). As David Bernard notes, these came to be the default embodiment "a universal mode of *jouissance*, with the effect of leaving the modern individual deprived from the support of any social tie whatsoever" (BERNARD, 2011, p. 203). Facing this unceasing proliferation of *fake* objects for consumption, and witnessing

6 The prefix hyper comes from Greek, meaning a position of superiority, either above or beyond, but with possible meanings of great intensity or excess. What drives us to use this prefix in the term for our modern Master's discourse is precisely this excess tied to *jouissance*.

“(…) the precarity of our mode of *jouissance*, which now entirely lies in the *plus-de-jour*, which does not seem to be uttered in any other form than this” (LACAN, 1974, p. 54), can we state that what is consumed in the process is the subject of language itself? And must we believe Lacan when he forecast the Capitalist’s discourse as essentially “bound for failure”?

Whereas the threat of failure may be present, the trick with capitalism is that its wits are unfathomable. Liberal policies are continuously *patching* the tyre for another mile to no end. Let us remind us of the *subprimes* crisis back in 2008, 11 years ago. Some particularly fed up economists, albeit not very aware of hypermodern policies and their propensity for renewal, pronounced neoliberalism dead. History shows them wrong. The various crises that neoliberal policies have been going through have prompted for massive mending, correction and revision. The Lehman Brothers bank may have sunk, others benefited from rescue plans. The money was injected back and within a few months, the system was up and running again. This turmoil amongst financial institutions created a crisis of a magnitude unseen since the 1929 financial crash. Nonetheless, the deepest crisis does not turn out to be of financial nature; we assess that the actual crisis is one of the Subject, as a consequence of the discursive activity of neoliberalism in its rise to power over any and every one, and whose extensive spread does not seem to possibly be contained.

This new hypermodern Master’s discourse, backed up at its convenience by the discourse of Science, then reigns unchallenged on every domain of human existence. The Master is supported by knowledge as a first-order center of interest and at the same time, as an instrument for affirming their legitimacy and a tool for modernization. Bureaucracy has become a major ally in the advent of the discourse of neoliberalism, which is something Lacan understood very early in his seminary called *L’envers de la psychanalyse*, by pinning the modern Master’s discourse as a “perverted Master’s discourse” (LACAN, 1991, p. 212). At present, neoliberal bureaucratization draws actively from this managerial effort. New Public Management is getting ever more rigorous, imperative and widespread. A new lexical field that is essentially drawn from the corporate management world is the fastest-growing there is. Performance management and permanent control devices are spawned, norms, blossoming procedures and assessments for all sectors of human activity, not to mention certifications and related practices related to corporate culture, are now shaping the normative grid of neoliberal rule. Self-proclaimed and labeled as “scientific knowledge”, these practices embody new modes of rationalization obeying the entrepreneurial logic (HIBOU, 2012, p. 86). The copulation between capitalism and scientific discourse is at such heights that it consolidates the hypermodern Master’s discourse even further.

At this stage, a line of questioning stands open in front of us. Does the discourse of neoliberalism, as the shaping vector of a reinforced framework for the hypermodern Master’s discourse, and bringing in its wake the Scholar’s and the Hysteric’s discourses, mean the end of the four other discourses? Are there really only two discourses left, with the Master and Analyst, whereas the Scholar and Hysteric are now oscillating around the Master’s axis? The latter is a discourse where the Capitalist’s and the Scholar’s discourses meld, one strengthened by the Hysteric’s discourse through its questioning, as seen with the recent events from *Nuit Debout* or with the *Yellow jacket* movement in France, and which paradoxically, end up consolidating and structuring the Master rather than posing a threat. Whereas capitalism may be a ‘modern Master’s discourse’ in Lacan’s point of view (LACAN, 1969-1970, p. 34), neoliberalism on its part is a hypermodern Master’s discourse, that is to say, a total and global discourse heralding contemporary politics. In front of its ubiquity and omnipotence, only the Analyst’s discourse seems to be able to maintain a dissident role and to occupy a subversive position, which lies on the flip-side of power dynamics, and thus unveil the real face of neoliberal civilization, and of its discontents.

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7 Translation of quotes was updated according to original editions.