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On the New Psychic Economy

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I am honored to play a role in introducing many of you to the *nouvelle economie psychique*, the so-called "new psychic economy," of Dr. Charles Melman, founder of the *Association Lacanienne Internationale* and director of teaching at Lacan's school of psychoanalysis. Although hesitant to restrain my excitement, optimistic that it will, in some capacity and by proxy, multiply itself fruitfully among you all, I cannot help but temper this attitude with a generous application of warranted seriousness. Because of what Melman's theory reveals to us, this seriousness is especially conditioned by
the events of the past few weeks both in America and in the global West.

Today, I will ask you to hear things a little differently; as we have already heard this program year, the fundamental purpose of psychoanalysis can be said to irritate. With this in mind, we renew the obvious question about the character and consistency of our discipline. At what point does psychoanalysis become something other than psychoanalysis? Relative to what we will cover today, does Melman's theory invite a social therapy, the promotion of a remedy for the malaise associated with new cultural structures? Is what he offers by way of this theory an ideological prescription? I invite these questions now so that they might erect waypoints for our investigation, which will inevitably and necessarily confront them.

I will confess up front that I do not believe what we are talking about is anything other than psychoanalysis in its most authentic, a discourse whose function has always been as a disruptive force, a dislodging mechanism: something which acknowledges the consequences in the spirit of Lacan that "the unconscious is the social." As such, I must take very preliminary efforts to explain outright that Melman's theory does not transform psychoanalysis, nor attempt to mature it in some ideologically-contingent direction—this is no dogma, no social therapy, nor academic exercise, nor a reading of culture which intends for anything other than the inexhaustible treasures of the psychoanalytic discourse proper: that of allowing us to hear differently, to turn our object ever so slightly again and again and again, exemplifying its composite in the detail of every new face.

Thus, today, I invite you to listen carefully. I cannot promise an exhaustive treatment of Melman's theory or heave out the full weight of its up-to-the-minute implications, but what I do promise by way of explanation—which is likely to gloss only the fundamentals—is sure to disturb.

Since the transmission of psychoanalysis almost entirely dictates our ability to enjoy its function, we must take care to transmit things from the right discourse. In English, this is a challenge.

Lacanian psychoanalysis enjoys, in the Anglosphere especially, a unique position, straddling two discourses—that of the psychoanalyst, naturally, and that of the university; this is more economical than it is intentional: those who have the means to *read*, in general, are usually

consigned to the university. We will get into the obvious problematics of this bleeding in more technical terms in the course of this presentation, but, suffice to say, what is at stake here is chiefly a matter of signifiers: the university discourse inaugurates the *author* in the position of S1, of the master signifier—I am sure many of us can already think of presentations we have attended that somehow are sustained by nothing other than names, dates, buzzwords, and page numbers—whereas the psychoanalytic discourse knows that the S1 is only a mercurial spotlight on a very populated stage, which can appear and reappear in various places.

If we are to examine the consistency of these discourses with Lacanian algebra, we will see that there is simply no point of sublimation between the transmission of the university and that of the psychoanalyst: in other words, we cannot unite the two superfluously. We have seen many attempts at a merger, but it is this irremediable discursive fissure, a nerve that is exposed in Melman's theory; like hypochondriasis, the emergence of the body, the perceptory apparatus itself in the field of the phenomenal is somewhere between the uncomfortable and the simply intolerable. Indeed, let us not deny the disparity: the university prescribes something in the order of ideology, inasmuch as its object is truth—a truth contingent on trends: trends of knowledge, philosophy, experience, and *jouissance*. In America, we cannot also fail to include the political, scientific, and economic corrosives which grant these trends a certain longevity. This is not psychoanalysis.

Melman's theory will open up questions which *exist* in this university dimension–in fact, I would venture to say that many of these are privileged topics, current lynchpins in the academy–but they are not addressed with the same *jouissance*; for instance, how today's changing (shall we say changed?) clinic represents an extensive cultural renovation shepherding us from the patriarchy, which supports the limits inherent to the signifier, towards a matriarchy that defies the laws of language itself: if dissolved sociologically, academically, again, in this university discourse, what is said here could be taken offensively. But we can push further. We will talk about the role of science as the 21st century legislator of reality, a fallacious attempt to wrangle the real in a social whose power is now delegated horizontally, between semblables. We will discuss, for instance, new critical and clinical attention to something like gender identity as an academic misreading on the side of *objectal jouissance*, when structure sits these symptoms irrevocably between the renunciation of a limit and clinical delusion. Further still, we will discuss a *ratage*, a failure, on behalf of young people today to forfeit their object—an infinite wellspring prescribed by a 21st century master discourse that structures their relationship to *jouissance* around the object, in binary terms of addiction or absolute deprivation—and submit to a universe of semblance and partial satisfactions.

This obsession in the university to be "politically correct" is an obsession that Dr. Melman identifies with a paranoid prohibition, born of this horizontal social order, which demands that "no one has the right to criticize any form of enjoyment," of *jouissance*. It is a paranoid and eminently dangerous place to be.

These things—a small and, of course, *provocative* slice of what is to come—do more than vaguely and theoretically gesture at the failure of a *noms-du-pere*, a doing-away with the fourth

round of the symptom, or a transformation from a society of desire to one of "*jouissance*:" there are real people at stake, and thus, real individuals suffering from a new kind of psychical order that most clinicians fail to recognize as suffering, encouraging instead, from the pulpit of the subject's immolation in enjoyment, an absolute embrace of an existence without limits.

Ultimately, if this small declaration has not made it evident enough, I come here today not as an academic, but as a psychoanalyst, analysand, friend, archivist and reverent observer of this suffering—someone who has walked through its fire and been consumed by it, wandered, and cobbled together a desire for myself in the rubble of this new social order. Without psychoanalysis, without the psychoanalytic discourse, this reconstitution would not have been possible. In this way, in the spirit of what I owe my subjectivity to, what I am asking you to do today is cede your preconceptions for a bit, suspend their discursive supports, while I try to tell you a story that I do not speak of in the third person, but rather, as representative in the first.

But by asking you today to open your ear, not with an appetite for poison, but perhaps to hear something disruptive, we remain firmly seated in the Freudian tradition; this point of comparison is more than a passing nod to acknowledge that we are, proverbially, on the right discursive track.

The society to which Freud spoke was contaminated by the many trappings of imperative social modesty: as Dr. J. P. Lebrun has said, it is thus that the "scandal of Freud's teaching was the demonstration of pervasive sexuality." Freud's society saw his teaching as an outrage against progress itself—progress whose S1, master, prescribed the absolute elevation of morality, the sacrifice for which was enjoyment. In an academic sense, we read about this society, perhaps we can call it retrospectively the "end-stage patriarchy," plenty; in Foucault, and in the doldrums of the post-modern, the hypermodern, which has exhausted its saying broadly.

But Lacan, who claimed himself to be none other than a keen reader of Freud, shares richly in this tradition of scandal—one that he formalizes with the *phallus*, the vector upon which meaning is hinged and constructed, and the center of the signifier, a gravity whose property is the world of representations. To understand what is truly at stake in this so-called patriarchal system, which I have already mentioned informs the very laws of language, we must spend some time on this revolutionary formalization, the phallic vector, whose psychic implications are generative of the subject—a subject whose very existence is predicated on division—as such.

It is at this point that we can proceed no further into Melman's thesis without logical deliberation, something polluted by a little mathematics, between the function of the *limit*, the *phallus*, and two different topologies of the *Autre*. I ask, with my apologies up front, that you entertain what is obviously somewhat of a logicians tautological enterprise before we can explore how the NEP helps us to read contemporary suffering in light of unprecedented psychical structures.

If there is an abstract tool to take away from Melman's theory, something that he reads in Lacan with prescient attention, it is the essential role, culturally and subjectively, of the *limit*. Let me be clear, to understand the function of the limit is to understand the technology of the psychic

apparatus proper. The limit itself solicits the meaning of having crossed it. I don't think anyone here has ever seen a television program about a murder where reconstructing the motive does not play the central narrative role.

With this in mind, the limit, in the social field of Freud's yesterday, is something that Dr. Melman describes in terms of his society, one "where sex was hidden, concealed by modesty" as a threshold, and where "a limit…had to be crossed in order to access sexual jouissance." This is the mechanism of the Oedipal prohibition as a prop for fantasy. But we will return to the social function of the limit—and its consequences—in just a moment.

On the terrain of the most elemental, the phallic vector embeds the limit in the technology of the signifier; the constitution of the letter itself illustrates that it is inaugurated by a logical repression: a boundary, a built-in failure; something, topologically, which negotiates a border between meaning and *jouissance* to arrest its perpetual sliding into nonsense. It is this threshold that we usually associate with the paternal metaphor; a function of real prohibition that invites our eye to wander, and our passions to drift onto the terrain of fantasy and the imagination. What if I had that? What if it wasn't forbidden?

This question, Moebian, contains within its rupturing the very possibility of suture, which we see demonstrated in the usual process of mourning: the lost person becomes the organizer, locus, and convergence of desire. We are usually and suddenly forced to reconcile impossibility with rose-colored glasses: the grandmother you did nothing but argue with is suddenly only memorable for the time she showed up to your new house with baked goods. It's a tearing and a stitching. All is forgiven, and the burden of affect is displaced as if it was you who had mistaken her for someone else in life. It really happens! The schema of fantasy we are familiar with from Lacan demonstrates this process logically: according to this schema, desire *must* be founded by something *other* than what it has access to. We can break this down more completely.

The schema of fantasy, $<>*a*, indicates that what causes desire is not inter-subjective, not another subject, but always in the register of the out-of-reach object. One subject, one object, constructed from the open wound of original loss. A linear asymptote dividing the two that we can read as the beautiful agony of desire.

Desire, then, in the sense that it vibrates the tension of this fundamental lack, this exogeny, wherein a subject "can only exist on the condition of dissatisfaction" (Melman), finds support as it renounces subjectivity in its objectal orientation. I am sure we can hear the echoes of Lacan's assertion that the complaint of one's lover having treated them like an object is really nothing but the exaltations of pure flattery: for to be loved is to, in structural terms and consistent with the adage, be changed, specifically, to become an object for another. So what do we do when the object is nothing but accessible, when the cup overflows, its value is no longer derived from the transformative divesting of the subjectivity of an other, a semblable wearing the costume of fantasy, but an object, pure and simple? Something we can get, something we can use-up and replace?

We will have to confront this question more completely as we turn our eye to the clinic of addiction, but let us not wait unnecessarily under the edifice of contrived illusion: the scientific and technological discourses, master discourses in our society of 'progress' at all costs, which observe no reverence for any limitation or boundary or threshold, where neither sky nor heavens nor atom nor binary is the limit, offer an endless array of *prosthetics* for desire, remedies for want, solvents for the agitation germane to the space between the barred subject and his object.

These discourses offer the completion of objects that entirely tranquilize or pacify, with curious effects: on a clinical level, we can certainly acknowledge that something has changed in the dimension of structure; we no longer talk of immaterial addictions like gambling as distinct from alcoholism, drug addiction, sex addiction, etc.: we find ourselves broadly wading through a homogenous clinic of addiction, one whose forms have their own uniquenesses, sure, but unified by a certain obviousness of structure, of relating to the subject, has, in many ways, become synonymous with gadgets like our smartphones, tablets, and computers.

Utility and play, work and enjoyment, are grafted a kind of superfluous value by these discourses. In very few instances do we ever face the castrating anxiety of having to completely renounce the Internet and its potential to satisfy through media, for example. When is the last time you had to go somewhere without your phone? Drive without the radio on or Bluetooth connected? As such, it can become quite difficult to see where the social field marks a 'tipping point' indicative of excess. We will come back to this.

But there is another logical aspect to the constitution of this new psychic economy which brings us ever closer to the boundary where theory becomes demonstration. This, of course, has to do with our relationship to the *Autre* as such. Although I have already probably missed the boat to explain, I would like to use this moment to justify a little my conservation of the French term, *Autre* instead of *Other*: it's simple, really–I think that there is too much strangeness, too much alienation in the term "Big Other," as if it describes the ultimate alterity. To wax a bit colloquial, this thing lives with you in your head, is embedded into your every word–what could be more familiar? But something has happened to our perception of this *Autre*, something with the consequence of foreclosure for one of its two functions.

In the Western universe, this mutation takes the form of a profound disavowal of what Melman calls "the Great Texts;" symbolic entities that organized our cultural lives. These modulations also appear at the individual level in the form of a "prevalence of horizontal dialogue with our peers…" as something that has replaced our "interest or attention to the message coming from the *Autre*" (Melman). When Melman conceived of his theory, he could not have envisioned the very *Fahrenheit-451-esque* world of endless podcasts, Spotify, and predictive algorithms, all which generate a special kind of persistent noise, without even the need for another person, to drown out the *Autre* in a horizontal universe of pure and sometimes specular semblance. We approach perhaps the possibility of a "unilogue" when such a thing defies the intersubjective transaction inherent to language itself.

So what did these Great Texts do for the subject? What kind of position did they establish for us in terms of the *Autre*? I apologize for spending some time here, but I don't believe we can cover the profundity of Melman's assertion of change without understanding tradition first. So, book club.

The obvious choice for our discussion, which has to do with the West, but probably most of the East too, is the Bible. This relationship is not spurious; for the psychical subject, these texts in the Bible have a unique election as conveyors or even engines of our subjective organization, particularly in our social life. To say whether they created it or sustain it exactly would be quite ambitious, and is the work of theologians anyway, so we will stick with examining their psychic implications. We know that they tether real to symbolic as the Ultimate Word, which we ought not to lose sight of–to say they are simply metaphor is altogether too tame: for this metaphor, many have died. A flag is only charged with symbolic value when you know that the red is there to represent blood.

We also know what kind of relationship this text establishes between the phallic vector and the *Autre*, since the limits of this phallic vector are, quite clearly, decided as absolute, incorruptible by faith, even in their arbitrariness. In fact, their arbitrariness is a bit of a precondition for their transmission. We know that the Word here takes on a value which is inexhaustible in meaning, actually infinite, but only in a chain where the interpretation is logically consistent with a finite number of signifiers. In so many words, the Gospel is no longer being written; there is a beginning and an end–not just a narrative end, but an unwavering number of pages, number of words. If this remains a little opaque as to its theoretical relevance, we will see this function better with an example.

So, let's take an exceptionally brief look at a story from the New Testament, and interrogate it about what the so-called "old model" of our psychic economy, the one bequeathed to us not horizontally, by our fellow man, but vertically, from God as Man in Christ, which is a different order transmission altogether, suggests to us about the social, and, therefore, the structure of the unconscious.

From the book of Mark, we are told a story about a man who "lived among the tombs," that is, on the outskirts of the city, that "no one could bind"--bind, yes, "chain," let us say chain in the topological sense of the signifying chain where representation attaches to meaning. "He had often been chained… but he tore the chains apart," Mark writes. Okay, so, there's an attempt made to preserve sense, the signifying battery, that continuously erupts in nonsense, a threat to the fabric of the laws of language.

It is written that "no one was strong enough to subdue him." Clearly, there is a struggle between semblables to keep this individual from being a disturbance, from breaking this chain of sense. The insinuation is that we can't handle him on our own, and with our earthly tools. But realism introduces a bit of absurdity in this sentence. I have seen four or five people pick up a small car. No one could subdue him? Wouldn't empathetic logic have us just put him down? Euthanize the irritant? Or, does this man, this excess, this outlier, misfit, serve some kind of purpose?

“Night and day he would cry out and cut himself with stones.” I think that, today, our clinical ear can hear the reverberations of this agony as psychopathology. But let us remain a moment in the dimension of the metanarrative, if we are searching for a prescription in it, an authoritative prescription about the phallic organization of the unconscious through the signifier.

“Night and day,” a kind of perpetuity is illustrated here, something which does not respect the circadian, something which seems, of course, in the register of the inexhaustible, the potentially infinite, something with extraordinary and incalculable energy. The anguish disrespects the most fundamentally human border, the time for wakefulness and the time for sleep. The body is all that remains to indicate that there is a person here, and it is a body full of repetitions, of real cuts in the absence of a legible symbolic scansion. An attempt to open up the body perhaps, or to bleed it, exhaust it, or even to indicate the persistence of a perversion of the unary trait–not the marking of something to indicate the presence of man, but the marking of man to indicate the presence of something else. We could go on awhile here playing with the meanings.

But then we have the emergence of a different order cut, that which is offered by means of caesura put forward by the master, here God Himself, a Man who *is* the Word. What happens to the wandering man when there is an intercession from S1? “When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s Name, don’t torture me!” *Che voui?* Suddenly, in the authoritative presence of the paternal function, something is arrested, the nonsense organized into a question: “what do you want from me?” A subject emerges. Desire. Something is missing. The signifiers take on a logical consistency.

A little further down in the passage, “Jesus asked him, “what is your name?”” Stop the sliding of meaning, and give me something composed in the order of *being*. He doesn’t ask “what ails you?” He isn’t here to amend suffering through logical knowledge, through the objective. He demands an address–submit to the symbolic, to the limits of the container wherein I might truly know you.

“My name is Legion,” the man replies, “for we are many.” In Luke’s account of the story, this “many” is identified–”many demons had gone into him.” Another perversion. Where we expect to find the name of one, the concession of the subject to a singular address, an inheritance of incompleteness, we find many. Not just many, but “Legion,” *legio*, an army, multitude. Something binding is at stake, a legate, messenger, conveyor.

But this word, which in the Koine Greek, although directly taken from the Latin, contextually suggests the indefinite reference to a great number under the command of a singular power. A potentially infinite, endlessly deferring, uncountable number. It seems that, to be inhabited in this way, a way replete in excess, represents an unbearable distortion of the signifying system; no one name can be called, no cut where the subject can emerge.

So, what happens now? Here's the curious part. This "many… begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss," to be abolished from… what? The field of representations? The domain of the symbolic? I leave it to you. But I must spoil the ending to make a point–Jesus seems to heed this plea, the logic of which is an interesting indicator of the function of this work as a Great Text. He doesn't snap His fingers, wave a wand, and purify this man of demonic possession. Instead, He sends "Legion" into "a large herd of pigs." Which then immediately run off a cliff and die. What would have been the difference, sending these demons out of the man immaterially, like a flash of smoke, or sending them into pigs, whereby through both outcomes these demons end up in, as it is written, the Abyss?

Well, this is where we might observe one critical aspect in the function of these Great Texts–that of *phallic justice*.

This is no Antigone. We don't watch the rite go unobserved, producing chaos in an ordered world. We see instead the paternal function intercede into chaos to generate a logic. The potentially infinite, addressed in the symbolic as Legion, is consigned to take a number, a countable number, a "large herd," something that exists as a joint between symbolic and real. In this way, Jesus did these demons no mercy: there was no salvation at stake for this population. No generosity or compassion for them. For our sake, however, justice is served when that population is first damned to the phenomenal terrain, where it can be indexed in its finitude, before being cast out to the dead. The infinite is merely stamped with the phallic vector before it is sent to its destination.

If you have followed this far, you might take stock of the lesson at stake in this commutative process as something akin to the function of the embodied *Autre*: in the maternal *Autre*, who we could say exists in the field of reality, this transformation generally takes place in the form that reifies the shit as a gift through symbolization; a metamorphosis that makes possible the very technology of metaphor accessible to the subject, and an operation which libidinalizes an object in the sense of desire.

But this is a reading that neglects accounting for a more authentic function of these Great Texts: in fact, if we were to imagine that this miracle is supposed to demonstrate a narrative of the restorative power of divine justice, we would see the townspeople react more consistently with having had their problem solved, and could envision that the next part of this story involves transformations of faith, baptisms, parties, and great thanks. But the people of this town, a town where we must ask ourselves why "no one was strong enough" to bind this man, ask Jesus, "plead," it is written, "plead with Him to leave their region." Thanks but no thanks! Get out! It says, in fact, that these townspeople "were overcome with fear."

Why?

Because the unconscious is the social. This isn't the story of one errant man's salvation–who knows what he did once he was "cured"--but a story about the organization of the town. The nuisance, the outcast, an eminently present reminder of suffering, of tension, was eradicated.

Legion can perhaps be heard better as *lesion*, something cut-off, something to organize desire, an *objet a*. If only we could get rid of him, the townspeople might say in conversation, then we would be free of this nonsense. But can't you see it was this nonsense that made an excellent stabilizer of discourse? Something to talk about! Someone, objectified as detritus, to aim at? To manifest the gravity of the lack and sustain desire.

But this is what is so curious about the function of this Great Text–Jesus came to bring wholeness: we should find wholeness unfamiliar, alien, antithetical to a natural state of human existence. This text is supposed to show that God's love *does* promise wholeness, but that wholeness is *not* what the social, certainly not the unconscious, is predicated on! It is often demonstrated by sermon and study that Christian love, a love that once embroidered repression into the Western social fabric, is inversive: it is written "those I love I rebuke and discipline." Today, this strikes us as manifestly contradictory—didn't we learn, through scientific deliberation, studies on infants and mothers, families and communities, and libraries of data that love is ideally about total embrace? Acceptance? The removal of all conditions?

With this parable as a demonstration of what came before these scientific proposals, and if we attempt to explain a mutation in our relationship with the Autre field, particularly relative to the *jouissance* it supports, we must formally consider the function of this field in two manifolds; that by which it is phallically vectorized, germane to the conditions of the signifier and, therefore, subject to the laws of language—which Melman associates with the operation of *actual infinity*, a limit to which we must concede, we can't play with it—and this other condition, tempered none by an arresting vector of sense, limitless, consuming, and enclosing, which Melman conceives of in terms of *potential infinity*.

These two domains, that of the potentially and the actually infinite, thus satisfy us as two conditions of this *Autre* dimension as a unified whole. This is, of course, formal theory–specifically a kind of topology, one that I would encourage you not to think of as bifacial, as Moebian, but as parallel: there is, in fact, a border between these two conditions, where a kind of transformation can take place in the transmitting property of the signifier, but which, nevertheless, cannot be ultimately dissolved.

Suffice to say, however, in the interest of that which we are approaching through this logic, that one of these functions can be eradicated in isolation: it is thus that the transformation we are witnessing on a social scale contends with the evacuation of this phallic signifier, an unravelling of the phallic embroidery in the *Autre* of the *Noms du pere*, a mark that carries with it the scansion of that which would be mathematically ordinal, meaning that each successive signifier is marked by a logic of countable progression reaching–failingly–towards an infinitely distant, impossible point on the horizon. Melman writes that this actual infinity, whose characteristics are "established by the *Noms du pere*… and organized by the limit" is the one we can acknowledge as consistent with the phallic, masculine dimension of meaning. Here is S1.

By contrast, this other *Autre* space, the potentially infinite space of S2, "substantiating the feminine position," is "capable of supporting the play of signifiers with no boundaries, no limits,

and no edges;" this is the dimension of the *Autre* we allude to when we speak of *objectal jouissance*–the undercurrent of addiction, and the pillar upon which these subjects of the *new psychic economy* are conceived. If this distinction between the actual and potential infinities can offer us something, it is chiefly that these two currents structure the *Autre* space, but, curiously, that the abolishing of one is entirely possible while leaving the other unscathed. We can understand, perhaps, how this applies in theory and in the context of the Great Text we have covered. But what does this mean in practical terms, in reality?

Well, we cannot truly index the breadth of social mutations contingent on this evacuation of one function in the *Autre* before we take stock of the great ascension in our century of a discourse whose decree is inexorable fact. I am talking, of course, about the discourse of Science—I am reminded of the painting by Jean-Paul Laurens of the Emperor Honorius: a young master propped up, not transcendent, but a man like you and I–a child, in fact–his feet not yet touching the floor as he warms the throne where a God once ruled with blazing crown and scepter. This discourse, unlike those who had pillaged the phallic trove of S1 before, does not derive its power vertically, meaning, its discursive hegemony is not authorized by the *real* of divine rite, from an intersection where the symbolic latches the real as it did, at the site of these Great Texts, but, instead by an inauguration completely endogenous to the field of representations.

This is to say, and I find that this is very important in order to transmit what Dr. Melman communicates, that the *discourse of science* substitutes, confuses, conflates, *reality as such* for the *real*. Why wouldn't it? If its teleological purpose is the eventual mastery of all things, its first erasure is the distance between man and nature, man and the divine. But this illusion of sameness, of semblance between exalted and lowly, since it *is* an illusion, cannot be played out in a real that can't be captured—that means that the war of truth is waged between semblables, in the dimension of representations!

For this service, it's only logical that this discourse of science dispenses with the paternal function, biologizing and categorizing based on the floating relativity of all things; this discourse dispenses with the election of *any element* that might take up privileged space in the symbolic, except for, of course, the intangible masthead of *progress*, its luminary, and therefore the *jouissance of mastery*. If we are speaking in theoretical and metaphorical terms, it is obvious how the limitless *jouissance* of the object is germane to the emptying of the sky, to borrow from Marcel Gauchet. The miracle of this discourse is substitution: it proffers information instead of meaning, fact instead of narrative, and authority, plucked from the imaginary fantasy of absolute objectivity–an ablation of the subject derived internally from its quantitative tautology–rather than from the concession to what is impossible.

If we can begin to hear what is going on, we can start to wonder about how exactly this dejection—I am hesitant to call it a foreclosure, since this is a patent topological inaccuracy, indeed, it is more the order of *refusal*—finds its support not on the logical terrain, but in real life—life, that is, in terms of reality.

In an Anglophone context, I have the liberty to quote Arthur C. Clarke, who wrote that "sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Of course, it is Clarke who said this from the pulpit of changing orders, namely in this transitional period of "countercultural revolution" in the 1960s, which, pregnant with the forecast of our future, demonstrates something significant that I must take a brief aside to address. We will return in just a moment to the question of what supports the discourse of Science in reality—the answer, just in order to dispel the cliffhanger, is this "sufficiently advanced technology," this illusion, magic.

But if we are here today, situated firmly in the analytic discourse, we are here to talk about suffering. Who suffers and how? For to conceive clinically of a "new psychic economy," we must recognize the existence of an ostensible "old" psychic economy that it is so profoundly dissimilar to that we cannot call it transformed, but replaced.

The tenets of this "old" psychic economy are those with which you are familiar, those that Lacan addresses in his reading of Freud, and the classic list of pathological categorizations that we study as a history in the development of psychoanalysis as a discipline. In this way, I don't feel it necessary to describe the nosographic differences point-by-point. You probably know them anyway from work with patients. But this does beg the question of the shift, of a temporal reconfiguring to which we can point our finger and address as "the moment." A boundary, border, edge where things kick off.

For the French, you will hear May of 1968. They have a small window that, politically, socially, they can dial into and say *oui, voila*, "yes, here it is." Laws were changed, social traditions upended, and there you have it. I offer that, consigned to North America as to not step on anyone's toes, this moment takes place broadly across the mid to late 1960s.

It is no genius observation to say that, at the beginning of the 1960s, in America, Jim and Jenny are walking to school in tie and jacket, skirt and ponytail. So-called "evening" makeup on a high school girl like Jenny would mean the social murder of her parents. Jim smokes a little reefer and, by consequence of his antisocial behavior, might be a candidate for a literal lobotomy. Hyperbole, sure, but certainly not impossible.

For these individuals, raised and cultivated as social subjects under the edifice of an oppressive, perpetual, and obvious Noms-du-pere, the revolution of the miniskirt, the dashiki, folk rock, and long hair offers not just a metaphorical salve for the tyranny of the paternal, but, on the structural conditions of already having these prohibitions inextricably embedded in the psychic technology of these subjects, also offers this inversion of the negativizing 'old' law up to positivizing, digestible *jouissance*.

I believe this point is significant, and it is directly the intended consequence of ejecting the phallic vector from the *Autre* space. The limits of and to desire *were installed* in this generation, all neuroses present, organizing, and operative, and, as a contrast from what was clearly the discomforts consistent with the malaise not of a civilization, but of society as such, these freedoms were truly that—freedoms, liberations. To interject one more idea here before

continuing, this is the register in which I would like you to hear what Melman calls the “social development of a liberal [psychic] economy”—liberal, not in terms of the political scene, but in the dimension of excess, excessive, generous. A society that promotes a liberal helping at the dinner table of enjoyment.

For the children and adults alike of the first half of the 20th century, this countercultural revolution was both antipode and antidote to the structural technology of the limit itself: desire need not be invited by the secret magnetism of transgression, the divisive command of prohibition, but by free and open love. The road of excess, Huxley tells us, leads to the palace of wisdom. But here’s the signifying trick. Would you know that this is the road of excess if you never passed the mile marker? If you hadn’t walked first the road of deprivation? Would walking this road in ignorance of its purpose not, in fact, lead to the palace of deleterious exhaustion?

This is precisely where we begin to talk about suffering.

Today, as it has been since this countercultural revolution, we are born crudely on the side of this road, and from then on, shepherded by mothers, fathers, teachers, priests, policymakers, auto mechanics, and janitors—all marching to the promise of freedom, the promise of enjoyment, of jouissance—but towards… what exactly?

I will tell you firsthand, as I promised, that I do not know where we’re going. I think it’s a destination that only those who aren’t ruined by objectal *jouissance*, whose desire has a trajectory and hasn’t blown out, seized up by excess, those whose subjectivity and experience of desire *has* already crystallized around the phallic limit—or those to whom the phallic was never the only means of *jouissance*, namely, in the S2 position of subject, the feminine position—know and can seek. The generations that follow, from, as we say, “Gen X” up to today, grow up walking this road of excess in the dark. Object to object to object. It is the road of infinite potential—there is no destination!

I see it happening, I have also walked this path, for a long time, and with real psychic consequences. Waiting for the real to define a limit in the absence of any symbolic mediator. This profound and, what should we call it, sublime genocide of all limits has left us, my generation, maybe yours, maybe your children’s, grandchildren’s, to wander. Left us in the midst of a great decay of the laws of language. Of difference! Of signifying difference, predicated on the *real* of sexual difference which has been entirely ignored, virtualized. Yes–yes! We are suffering. We suffer because the architecture of the social is still well engaged in a psychic civil war.

In the first half of the twentieth century, as in the many centuries preceding it, it was the subject who was divided, and the social which was the impenetrable whole–conformity was not a question, but conformity didn’t mean homogeneity, and did, in fact, invite the authenticity of the act, the inauguration of real individuality, against it. Today, it’s the subject who is impenetrable, a whole–we call them “the individual.” Society is divided. We are not talking about politics. We are

talking a disavowal of the phallic and the compass whose North is now set towards *objectal jouissance*.

We like “who,” so who exactly is holding the reins here?

Well.

This is purely the pendulum motion of history. There is no “who.” Melman will tell you meaningfully that the discourse of Science appears to be speeding things up, but, in fact, it is only a symptom. Our duty, even sharing in what might be the outrage of what I say, is *not* to moralize. Melman writes that “psychoanalysis is not here to save the father.” We’re not going backwards, ladies and gentlemen. It wouldn’t be productive, nor would it be consistent with our purpose as analysts. It is almost certainly impossible anyway, which means that chasing this return would also land us in the hamster wheel.

What we are to do, what our ethics prescribe, is that we hear the suffering of our patients for what it is–not in the dimension of now-obselete ideologies of absolute liberation–this is *not* Freud’s society, we do not need to strengthen the ego or invite our patients to ‘become themselves’ in the sense of a singular individualism that produces the subject as distinct: our social mechanisms already do this: no need to inherit a name, and therefore a debt–make your own, be your own person. Our duty is to try and understand what is going on, and reject, entirely, the illusory guarantee of wholeness that we are promised by the lowly object, whose condition is that we abolish is desire itself. Once again, how is it that this plays out in real life? How has this happened across the West?

Technology, these gadgets that I have already acknowledged as prosthetics for desire, convinces us, hermetically sealed in the field of representations of course, that this progress, this doing-away with all limitations, is even possible. That we are entirely within our rights, not just our rights, but it is the *debt* of the real to give itself over to us. That the real owes itself to us.

The 1960s is not just a pivot from stuffy, upright, clear-cut social roles to free sex and love, but the moment we broke into the heavens, the moment we decided, using the scientific trajectory and many personnel from the Nazi regime, the possibility of global atomic annihilation. These things comprise the *resume* of the Western Scientific discourse. But, beyond these dramatic scenes, there is still the social, a liaison for the limit, or, today, lack thereof.

Let’s think a moment about how we can hear something real in this rallying phrase from yesterday, “free sex and love.” How about a social promotion of *sex free from love* in the advent of widespread birth control? Or how about *reproduction free from sex*, as we cross the threshold of viable, possible artificial insemination? Melman and Dr. Lebrun make a tremendous deal about this–never *ever* in the history of humankind has reproduction been conceivable without sex, without the sexual encounter, without first the failure of sexual encounter, the failure to make the sexes homotopic, the tilled soil of the couple.

Today, sexual difference need not be confronted in any real way at the site of the conjugal relation. If Freud set out to discover whether or not the Oedipal condition was universal for all, Lacan, of course, operates at the level which presupposes the universal value of sexual difference.

And sexual difference is gone! No wonder we have loosed our conception of the sexes free from the real, claiming that it is entirely constructed, that all it was was an index of expectations, inequalities, and profound abuse on the side of the signifier. No wonder the apprehension of a sexual reality *qua* gender identity has become accessible in the economy of objects. We feel compelled to overthrow the limits of the sexual rapport, and recodify sexual experience as *being, identity*. These calls for recognition, not in the great universe of others, but as singularly privileged, charged with a positive value, are they not an attempt at asserting an equivocacy with, a domination over the phallic as a place of having enjoyed hegemony as the "plus-one?" In other words, does their exclusive and defining status not attempt to symbolize, to emulate the exclusive value of the phallic vector? We see psychoanalysis used by the academy in service of this attempt at mastery, backed, indeed, by the fact that science has dispensed with the limit: if it is all imaginary, if it is all symbolic, my body signifies whatever I, whole, the seat of knowledge, a god unto myself, say it signifies. My jouissance is not up for debate, and cannot be challenged. Are we not well and truly past Lacan at this point?

Science has reconciled the impossible of sexual difference, but, once again, Science is just the symptom. Perhaps the long shadow of these Great Texts still organizes our lives, fating us to see them to the end–we are building, brick by brick, a tower of Babel that would have us stand on equal footing with God, in all our singular individuated glory. But this isn't Science. It's… what?

The exhaustion and refusal of desire.

Maybe it has come to a point of such tremendous interconnectedness, such tremendous allowance–such incredible privilege, to borrow a word from the university–that we find we would like to do away with the reality principle. Perhaps so much of what we see and are fed has satisfied our appetites to the extent that we would be happy doing away with them entirely.

It's a curious comparison, but not an unfair one, to say that we have somehow reorganized the knot of the subject in terms of object addiction. Melman explains that the addict "tells us the truth about what is today the dominant scientific and economic ideology." Inasmuch as the unconscious is the social, we can see how this structure, in some senses, preserves the social bond; every alcoholic has a drinking buddy: someone to encourage another shot, to share the *jouissance* with, to ensure that the party doesn't end until the real takes over and you both pass out.

In this horizontal society, this is our outstretched hand to one another. Is this the best we can do? Fixated on sustaining a kind of anhedonic paralysis of desire, this excess, what most

psychotherapies, and, dare I say, contemporary psychoanalysts promote, this excess is what we think should organize the subject?

It's an addiction. A socially promoted addiction. What does society prohibit anymore? Nothing. It sustains the fantasy of a satisfied appetite. A normalization of hysteria. Something that convinces us we can purchase satisfaction, whether it's pot at the dispensary or an affirmation of identity on a Cheeto's bag during Pride Month, and enjoy ourselves with no exogenous corrosion. Maybe it is merely the realization of Freud's utopian vision, lifting forever the veil of repression, whose authoritarian rule without relent determined the course of this trajectory.

But the psychical subject, however satiated, is not conceivable as a structure of wholeness.

To be complete, especially to complete oneself, is a delusion that resists stability. A substitution of the *Ich* where there ought to be a *Nom-du-pere.* There is a practical difference in the subject relative to the real supports of the symbolic between having inherited a name, the assumption of debt, and deciding it for yourself. It becomes like an amnesia, where it is not the memory apparatus that is compromised, but the concession to responsibilities relative to one's history. These amnesic patients come to the clinic a bit confused, but don't seem too unhappy: they are complete. It's when they recover that they become depressed! The proposal that we might attain completion, once again, defies the structure of desire proper: desire is an open set—it needs elements from the outside in order to be transformed, partially satisfied, and, given this partiality, sustained.

In a structurally similar way, when it is division itself that we condemn, we are consigned to create it: in social terms, we see the paranoid way this plays out. On the political stage, especially in America, for instance, both liberal and conservative alike live by this same paranoid relation to the other: a complete rejection of difference, and the harrowing, destructive impulse–a remnant of this desire–to see the other not just snuffed out, but humiliated, discarded, and ultimately transformed into a piece of shit that can organize our relationship more concretely with one another. A clear outlier, our "Legion," something to oppose. A plea to be left out of the wholeness. And this process makes a lot of people a lot of money! Go pick up a newspaper–it's nothing revolutionary.

This paranoia, which is truly offered to us in clinical form, returns us to the primal fear of the stranger; someone has appeared in the field of reality who owes himself to a different ancestor, a different heritage, and with a different relationship–or, perhaps, no relationship at all–to the conditions of repression constitutive of our necessary castration, and therefore does not seek our jouissance. In a social field renovated towards the primacy of jouissance over the primacy of desire, we need not imagine the profound and reaching implications of this paranoid arrangement. If it is not our direct experience as witness, we see it perpetually on the news, we saw it last week especially; it is Lacan who wrote that "when society is real, acts are symbolic:" demonstrations work, marches and causes function, the banner of change produces it.

But when it is “society that has become symbolic, acts become real.” Delinquency. Political fanaticism and rigid but baseless traditionalism. School shootings. Assassinations.

Violence reminds us every day that this paranoia has real, eminent consequences. That suffering is not longer vectorized, symbolizable, but transmitted in the real. Words, felt as daggers, solicit bullets, taking lives. These are the kind of dangers presented to us in this new psychic economy. These are the products of a society of objectal *jouissance*. These are the acts that define the transition period between yesterday and tomorrow.

As to not leave things so sourly, however, let us not forget, Melman links the development of the new psychic economy broadly to what he calls “progress in the science of man.” In this way, do these unprecedented configurations, these strange new subjective orders bring nothing but anguish? Not necessarily. If we are to recapitulate things, what is it that we see in today’s clinic, exactly? An uptick in so-called “borderline” states, depression, bulimia, anorexia, ADHD; symptoms no longer organized by the signifying system, but those which evidence new relationships with the real, with consumption, the object, the body, *jouissance* and the limit. In topological terms, we observe many iterations of a structure that has done away entirely with this fourth round, the one we associate with neuroticism, the Noms-du-pere, with the symptom as we knew it from our books. These are subjects who, very plainly, must negotiate their relationship to the limit through the real instead of the symbolic. But, as Dr. Thierry Roth explains, this is part and parcel in the extension of psychoanalysis as a discourse; reconceptualizing of the subject consistent with its new relationship to the laws of language is “one of the major challenges of psychoanalysis in the 21st century!”

Melman invites us to the threshold of questions which our discourses today not only discourage, but structurally resists: why can’t we tolerate difference? Prohibition? Semblance? Why is it that we have grown intolerant of inequality? If inequality is that pressure by which the object of our desire is first shaped, does this not become a question of ridding ourselves, once and for all, of desire itself, in a kind of ultimate entropy? When the social order becomes entirely horizontal, characterized by a tyrannical absolutism of the homogenous, without a locus sought in common repression but in unified expulsion of all difference, what can we say happens to the psychic mechanism?

These questions have answers already being demonstrated in the field of reality, if you look around.

So–if we are to remain in the psychoanalytic discipline, and, therefore, transmit from the position of its discourse, we must turn our ear to listen differently. To hear suffering in the register of excess–not for want of fulfillment. We are not here to put the father on life support. To champion a return to traditionalism. It wouldn’t work anyway. But, as Melman suggests, we should take stock of what is going on: if we as analysts fail to notice the structure of these profound changes to the psychic economy, the unconscious and its extension, fail address them *really*, with a little common sense, being swept up instead in the tide of trends that distort our discipline towards

the promise of wholeness, we are consigned also to bury our discourse and continue to prophesy, unconnected and drowned in the endless sea of *jouissance*.

If I have not exhausted you enough, are there any questions?