

The man without gravity

Enjoyment at any cost

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	4
I.....	9
Considerable progress	10
Breaking boundaries.....	12
What Freud discovered.....	13
Where has authority gone?.....	17
What place for the subject?	18
Progress... really?	20
A human nature?	22
An economy that encourages incest?.....	23
Envy rather than desire.....	25
The return of authority?	27
Depression for all.....	29
Laws we are still bound by!	31
Castration: necessity or contingency?.....	33
Clinical effects.....	35
II.....	38
A widespread perversion.....	38
The future of the "used"	40
An economy of signs	43
The dual use of pharmakon	44
How to escape adolescence?	45
The responsibility of the subject	50
Inevitable violence	52
A knowledge society	54

III.....	56
The father's misunderstanding.....	56
The other is not a stranger	57
Patriarchy or matriarchy	59
The future of matriarchy	64
The laws of language	67
Symbolism and Symptom.....	68
Social psychosis and subjective channel surfing.....	70
Psychiatry in the face of the new psychic economy	77
What can the law do?.....	80
IV	83
The imprint of nostalgia	83
A third way?	85
Egalitarianism in enjoyment.....	87
The fate of great texts.....	89
A subject finally free!	91
The death drive	92
The father today? A comedian.....	94
A stateless subject	97
Poor social ties.....	98
And still: what to do?	100
When science takes the place of text.....	103
A genderless unconscious?	105
V	108
An unconscious in flux?	109
The only serious thing: sex	112
A transfer that is too real.....	114
A change in demand.....	117
Who can decide on responsibility or lack thereof? 119 The pitfalls of transmission.....	124
Always the law!.....	126
Death removed	12
Denial instead of repression	129

The craze for cults	130
Where is education headed?.....	132
VI	134
The discourse of capitalism	134
Doing without the father, provided we can use him.....	137
A new psychic economy for the analyst?.....	139
Appendices	144
Finally, a new jouissance: necroscopy 22	14
Introduction to the new psychic economy 23.....	14
Glossary 24.....	155
Afterword. Life Plus	166

I wanted to expose the dangers that equality poses to human independence, because I firmly believe that these dangers are the most formidable and least anticipated of all those that the future holds. But I do not believe they are insurmountable.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America.

Foreword

A young man in his twenties, who had recently moved in with his girlfriend and become a father, complained to me:

"When I was younger, I had lots of girls; I slept with them in cars, in garages, anywhere... so now, 'one' woman and one bed... it's boring!"

This statement might seem

hardly new in everyday clinical practice. What was new, however, was that the renunciation, the "mourning" that was thus imposed on this patient seemed incongruous to him, as if it were not self-evident. What was happening to him was unbearable and initially provoked his protest. Where, he wondered, did this idea come from, that one should give up permanent enjoyment? Why should one have to pay the price for a choice? Why should one be struck by such injustice?

Yesterday, even proverbs and other maxims reminded us that not everything is possible – "You can't have everything!" – that we must accept the consequences of our actions – "You reap what you sow!" – and that we must consider the consequences of our actions – "There's no use running, you have to start on time!" Today, the most commonly quoted adage, and for good reason, is: "You can't have your cake and eat it too!"

Whereas yesterday, most patients who sought out a psychoanalyst were looking for a way out of the neurosis inherent in desire, today, those who find their way to his office often come to talk about their entrapment in excessive pleasure. So what has happened —what is happening —that enjoyment has so regularly prevailed — and continues to prevail —over desire?

No one would dispute that we are currently facing a *crisis of reference points*. Whatever the relevance of this expression, the task of thinking about the world in which we live is therefore more urgent than ever. The transformations of our societies, following the combination of the development of technoscience, the evolution of democracy, and the rise of economic liberalism, force us to reexamine most of our former certainties. At least, if we do not want to be satisfied with simply acknowledging the considerable changes in our behavior that these transformations have brought about.

We see how difficult it is for people today to find guidance, both in terms of making decisions and analyzing the situations they face. Is this surprising in a world characterized by violence, both at school and in the community, a new attitude towards death (euthanasia, the decline of rituals, etc.), transgender issues, the vagaries of children's rights, economic constraints and even dictates, addictions of all kinds, the emergence of new symptoms (male anorexia, hyperactive children, etc.), the tyranny of consensus, belief in authoritarian solutions, transparency at all costs, the influence of the media, image inflation, constant recourse to the law and justice as the "panacea" for life in society, the demands of victims of all kinds, alienation in the virtual world (video games, the Internet, etc.), the demand for zero risk, etc.

One might think that, faced with all these questions, it would suffice to produce new knowledge to guide us and enable us to navigate comfortably in this new world. But we would quickly be disillusioned: even the most exhaustive knowledge does not prevent us from having to form our own opinions in order to decide what to do in the face of major changes. In fact, it is precisely where knowledge is lacking that we cannot escape the need for judgment. Therefore, by relying on more knowledge, we would only be postponing the confrontation with this inevitable flaw in knowledge, and our subjective commitment would become even more difficult.

Can psychoanalysis be of any help in this regard? We know that Freud saw no contradiction between individual psychology and social psychology. Let us recall the opening lines of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*:

"The opposition between individual psychology and social psychology, or crowd psychology, which may at first glance seem very important, loses much of its sharpness if we examine it

thoroughly. Certainly, individual psychology has as its object the isolated individual and seeks to know by what means he attempts to obtain satisfaction of his instinctual drives, but in doing so it is only rarely—under certain exceptional conditions—able to disregard the individual's relations with others. In the psychological life of the individual taken in isolation, others regularly intervene as models, supporters, and adversaries, and therefore individual psychology is also, from the outset and simultaneously, a social psychology, in this broader but perfectly justified sense."

Thus, when faced with major social phenomena, Freud never failed to contribute his insights. He even wrote several [books](#) on these issues, including his famous *Civilization and Its Discontents*. But more than a century separates us today from the emergence of psychoanalysis, and the beginning of our century is in no way comparable to Vienna in 1900. It is therefore not surprising that we are forced to resume the work. Especially in a period of change such as the one we are currently experiencing. For our part, we have already been working on this for several years, notably in our books *Un monde sans limite (A World Without Limits)* and *Les Désarrois nouveaux du sujet (The New Confusions of the Subject)*.

However, in March 2001, during a series of psychiatric meetings on the theme of "Man put to the test by [contemporary](#) society," we had the opportunity to hear Charles Melman contribute to the debate on the current "malaise in civilization" by announcing the emergence of what he already called "*the new psychic economy*." . " The novelty, strength, and relevance of his analysis were immediately apparent to us. It was no longer a question of simply evoking social changes and their impact on individual subjectivity, but of examining an unprecedented transformation that was already producing effects. These effects could be major and affect both individuals and collective life. He was proposing,

It seemed to us that these were essential elements for understanding and analyzing the *crisis of reference points* we are facing.

His radical reading of the current situation led us to consider a large-scale change with *incalculable anthropological consequences*, which establishes a congruence between an unbridled liberal economy and a subjectivity that believes itself to be free of any debt to previous generations—in other words, "producing" a subject who believes they can make a clean break with their past.

All of this seemed to justify a proposal to Charles Melman to say more in a series of interviews on this "new psychic economy" that he said he was identifying. His response was open and immediate. And the work began.

What you are about to read is the fruit of our exchanges, which took place between July 2001 and July [2002](#). The interview format certainly has its limitations. However, it seemed particularly suited to grasping a body of thought that was still in the process of formation, forced to forge a path through little-explored avenues and compelled to give an account of facts whose understanding is far from assured. It also allowed us to address a non-specialist reader as much as possible by encouraging us to abandon our psychoanalytic jargon. Our aim was to try to make the honest man hear what this new century has to offer him, and how psychoanalysis can provide him with different, even unknown, points of reference to help him find his way.

No doubt some will be surprised, others irritated, and still others astonished by certain remarks about the current malaise, which should be described as forward-looking. But we hope that everyone will find something here to fuel their thinking without compromising on what the task of thinking entails. And by asking themselves what are the constants of the human condition that must always be passed on.

These interviews open up a crucial debate about the human condition, about what is capable of radical change and what remains unshakeable. It is not only psychoanalysts who have something to say on this subject, of course. Anthropologists, lawyers, philosophers, sociologists, and many other representatives of various disciplines are also invited to contribute. But what psychoanalysts currently hear during sessions when listening to patients behind the couch cannot but lead them to look beyond the confines of their offices. The words spoken today allow them to hear their resonance with the noises of the city.

We have therefore continued with these interviews what we had already begun: attempting to take up the "challenge" that our society, increasingly deprived of its traditional reference points and therefore forced to seek new ones, presents to psychoanalysts. We would be greatly rewarded if these exchanges contributed to inspiring others to question the subjectivity and psychological future of contemporary man.

For if the conjectures debated in the following pages prove to be well-founded, if *Homo faber* does indeed give way to "manufactured man," if it is, therefore, "new men"—these "men without gravity," almost mutants—that we will now have to deal with, we must point out that the stakes would be immense and that we are only barely glimpsing them here.

All that would remain, then, as a parting thought, would be to recall Hölderlin's famous phrase: "But where danger grows, there also grows that which saves."

JEAN-PIERRE LEBRUN

I.

J.-P. Lebrun: You recently spoke before an assembly of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, putting forward the following argument: "We are moving from a culture based on the repression of desires, and therefore neurosis, to one that recommends their free expression and promotes perversion. "Mental health" today is no longer a matter of harmony with the Ideal, but with an object of satisfaction. The psychic task is greatly relieved, and the subject's responsibility is erased by purely organic regulation." And you have chosen as the title at your comments: "Introduction to *the* new psychic economy." Why use the definite article right away? Why not just refer to "a" new psychic economy, following the cultural shift you identify?

CH. Melman: Because there is now a remarkable consensus in terms of behavior, conduct, and choices in favor of the spontaneous adoption of a new morality. These are all manifestations that leave little doubt about the novelty of this psychic economy that we are in the process of inaugurating. There is a new way of thinking, judging, eating, having sex, getting married or not, experiencing family, country,

ideals, and living one's own life. The emergence of a new psychic economy is evident, and I believe it is justified to say *so*, since we have sufficient reference points, without needing to resort to new concepts, to describe what is taking shape.

J.-P. Lebrun: Do you mean that this psychic economy did not exist before? Or do you think that it existed in a marginal way, but that it now occupies center stage?

ch. melman: I don't think it existed before. It may have seemed to exist in the form of revolts, marginality, fringe phenomena, as in the very interesting Situationist movement, for example. But these were mainly attitudes of opposition: people positioned themselves in relation to what constituted firm, established, and seemingly unshakeable reference points. This is no longer the case. Today, people travel, they allow themselves to exist, they create their own space. It is no longer a movement of opposition, it is a movement that is gaining momentum.

J.-P. Lebrun: So what does this new psychic economy consist of?

Ch. Melman: We are dealing with a shift that is taking us from an economy organized by repression to an economy organized by the exhibition of pleasure. Today, it is no longer possible to open a magazine and admire the personalities or heroes of our society without them being marked by the specific state of exhibition of enjoyment. This implies radically new duties, impossibilities, difficulties, and different kinds of suffering.

A considerable advance

J.-P. Lebrun: Why has the existence of such an economy suddenly become possible? To what do you attribute this change?

Ch. Melman: To considerable progress, but at the same time, as is often the case, progress that undoubtedly carries with it serious threats. The considerable progress is that we have effectively come to terms with the fact that the sky is empty, empty of God, of ideologies, of promises, of references, of prescriptions, and that individuals must determine their own destiny, both individually and collectively. The last two centuries have been those of great inventions and the identification of limits: in mathematics, Hilbert; in logic, Gödel; in politics, Marx; in psychology, Freud and his Oedipus complex. The century that

ahead of us will be the century in which they are lifted: no more impossibilities. As usual, the moralists were the initiators, let us name them: Foucault, Althusser, Barthes, Deleuze, who proclaimed the right not to happiness but to enjoyment. And science followed them into the field—biology—where it was least expected. The decisive intervention was undoubtedly the mastery of fertility and then of reproduction. Stolen from God, the power of creation now makes it possible to bring new organisms into being. In a way, we are witnessing the end of an era, a liquidation

- in analytical terms, it would be like a *collective liquidation of the transference* *, which is the source of a rather remarkable freedom.

J.-P. Lebrun: A collective liquidation of transference? That's a nice way of putting it! Do you mean all transference, the very notion of transference *, in other words, that particular emotional bond identified by Freud?

CH. Melman: Yes, of transference insofar as it can apply to people as well as to blocks of knowledge. There is no longer any authority, any reference, or any knowledge that holds sway—precisely because of transference. We are now only in the realm of management; there are only practices.

J.-P. Lebrun: To illustrate this new psychic economy, you like to refer to an exhibition on anatomical art which, after being shown in various cities in Europe and elsewhere, was recently held in Brussels. Why is it so emblematic?

CH. Melman: It is indeed an interesting exhibition, the work of one of our anatomist colleagues from the Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine, Dr. Gunther von Hagens. He has developed a remarkable technique: by placing fresh tissue or corpses in an acetone bath, he expels the water from the cells and replaces it with epoxy resins, so that the corpse is protected from decay, as if it were plasticized

in their original forms. It became possible to pose them in lifelike positions. Visitors could admire the runner, the thinker, the gymnast, the thrower, chess players, all strikingly authentic.

These corpses, destined for eternity, are generally, but not always, skinned. Their superb musculature is exposed. Often, trepanation reveals part of the brain. The cheek, partially dissected, reveals the muscle insertions. The genitals, flaccid but in good shape, are on display. The entire collection of these statues makes up the exhibition. There is also a very beautiful female body, this one not skinned, with absolutely superb breasts. A small piece of fertilized uterus protrudes carelessly from her open belly. A soft light illuminates the exhibition, conducive to contemplation. It is filtered through panels whose two blades enclose thin sections of the severed and colored human body, giving them the original appearance of stained glass windows.

This exhibition was first presented in 1997 in the German provincial town of Mannheim. The doors had to be left open 24 hours a day to satisfy the impatient crowds. It has since traveled to Tokyo, where it attracted two and a half million visitors, and

Vienna, where it was a huge success. There is every reason to believe that we will soon be able to admire it in Paris. The reasons for this are explained at length in a catalog weighing nearly two kilograms. It includes contributions from distinguished German professors, who naturally emphasize the importance of disseminating anatomical knowledge, but also the aesthetic pleasure to be gained from viewing this exhibition.

Crossing boundaries

J.-P. Lebrun: Why make it a paradigmatic illustration of the new psychic economy?

Ch. Melman: I use this story to highlight the fact that we are crossing boundaries. This is a significant boundary to cross, since one of the characteristics of the human species is the special place it reserves for burial and the respect that usually surrounds it.

This exhibition and its popular success therefore highlight how, perhaps without our knowledge, a new boundary has been crossed. The question is what we can say about it, how we can conceptualize it. What has been erased here is the permanence of a place that is generally a place of memory, a sacred place, of course, where the human body, once dead, is sheltered and hidden from view. What today constitutes our demand for transparency, our taste for light, is thus able to operate quietly. Or almost quietly.

J.-P. Lebrun: One might object that there are already places where the dead are exposed to view, such as the famous Capuchin cemetery in Palermo. So what is new here?

CH. Melman: It's very different. You can't compare the feeling inspired by a visit marked by piety and respect with the aesthetic and anguished satisfaction provided by this exhibition. It's also a tremendous commercial venture: instead of presenting a *French cancan*, we present corpses lifting their legs... It's really necrophilia, a kind of necroscopy. The technical process developed by our "artist" allows, with complete impunity and for the best of reasons, in a convivial atmosphere, a "scopic" enjoyment of death. And thus the crossing of what was yesterday both forbidden and impossible. Authenticity, in this case, is just a good selling point.

The disappearance of the sacred nature of death is consistent with this abolition of all transfer I mentioned earlier. A society that derives pleasure from the spectacle of death is disturbing, to say the least. You can see how the abolition of what was usually a festive occasion, the source of revelry, *feasting*, intoxication, dancing, encounters, and moments of madness, for which the figure of Dionysus served as a reference, in favor of a spectacle that gathers crowds around images of death, has a premonitory aspect that deserves the attention of psychoanalysts and ethnologists. This is why I spoke of a new psychic economy: I see it as an entirely new and collective phenomenon.

J.-P. Lebrun: Can you think of other manifestations of this new psychic economy?

CH. Melman: We could take another extreme and note that, after all, our relationship to sex is undergoing a similar change. Until now, we belonged to a culture based on representation, that is, on evocation, on the evocation of the place where the sexual authority capable of authorizing exchanges was located. We have moved from the *representation* that is familiar to us, customary in our relationship with sex, which we never did more than approach, to—it seems—preferring its *presentation*. As with this "anatomical art," we are now seeking the authentic, in other words, no longer an approach organized by representation, but going to the object itself. If we continue along these lines, what marks this cultural shift is the erasure of the place of concealment that shelters the sacred, that is, that which sustains both sex and death. Thus, sex is now seen as a need, like hunger or thirst, now that the limits and distance inherent in the sacred that sheltered it have been lifted.

What Freud discovered

J.-P. Lebrun: Is that what you mean by the erasure of boundaries?

Ch. Melman: Yes, because it turns out that, at the same time, what is lost is what Lacan calls the object a^* , the cause of desire, this initial lost object whose elusive nature sustains the quest for our desire. In the same movement—which seems even more interesting to me—the subject disappears as animated by this quest, the subject as the subject of the unconscious, the one who expresses himself in dreams, slips of the tongue, and failed actions. For, after all, Freud's discovery, if there is one, is that he allowed us to verify—for it is less a theory than what our daily practice allows us to experience every day—that the subject's relationship to the world, as well as to itself, is not organized by this

which would be a direct and simple link to an object, as in the animal world where one simply follows one's instincts. If Freud made any discovery, it is this: our relationship to the world and to ourselves is established not by an object, but by the lack of an object, and of an object of choice, an essential object, a cherished object, since, in the Oedipal figuration, for example, it is the mother who is in question. This unfortunate human subject must go through this loss in order to gain access to a world of representation that is tenable for them, where their desire is both nourished and directed and their sexual identifications are more or less assured.

We are the only ones in the animal kingdom whose sexual fulfillment is organized by a dysfunction, since the choice of object is determined not by identification of the characteristic features of the partner, a partner of the opposite sex, or specific smells, but by loss, by renunciation of the beloved object. This dysfunction is necessary for the sexual to be fulfilled in the speaking being

can be fulfilled; it must have access to a semblance, a facsimile.

This type of dysfunction—which we encounter regularly in any approach to children—is necessary for the subject's relationship to the world, to his desire, and to his identity to be established. We can see how this loss obviously sets a limit and how this limit has the property of maintaining the subject's desire and vitality. Contrary to a simplistic approach to the Oedipal situation, the father is not so much the one who forbids as the one who sets an example of how the limit can be crossed in order to fulfill one's desire, one's sexual desire. Everyone knows that the fulfillment of sexual desire always has this momentarily abnormal, somewhat transgressive aspect.

(The function of the father is therefore to put the impossible at the service of sexual pleasure... and one wonders by what aberration the father has come to be identified as the prohibitor of desire when he is in fact its promoter. Freud needs to be tormented a little on this point!

It is not for me to remind you of the fate that befalls the father figure today, how, in a manner that is all the more surprising given how deeply ingrained it is in our culture, we are working to emasculate this figure, which is increasingly being banned, mistreated, and devalued. I am pleased that a bill has been introduced to finally allow fathers in France to take leave after the birth of their child. But paradoxically, this new possibility forces them into what will still be a maternal role.

/ This is obviously remarkable. The resurgence of a frenzied and violent love for the father figure in a number of areas is one of the consequences of the way fathers are now viewed. Here, in the form of nationalist or religious explosions, we see the expression of a kind of vocation on the part of sons, of young people, to

restore and reestablish this figure in a consistent form. This father will not let himself be pushed around; he will be a father who has what it takes, a strong, solid father. The gangs, in the areas where they are forming, seem no less driven by this desire to build a community of belonging where the figure of a mythical ancestral leader emerges as a fili-(grane. All it takes is for a religious professional to pass by for it to take shape.

This change we are witnessing is linked, it seems to me, to the fact that the boundary we mentioned is now obsolete. There is no longer any difficulty in crossing it.

J.-P. Lebrun: The term "crossing" still refers to the old psychic economy, which clearly indicates the difficulty. Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that the boundary has been erased, pulverized?

CH. Melman: Yes, absolutely. It is so easily crossed that it has been erased.

J.-p. lebrun: It swallows itself, makes itself disappear as a limit. And this is reminiscent of what you just mentioned, which seems very relevant today: the demand for presentation rather than representation, and therefore, at the same time, for transparency...
/

CH. Melman: That's what cinema has become. It no longer means anything; it shows, it reveals, it exhibits.

J.-P. Lebrun: We see this in the fascination with the "Loft Story" experience...

/ ch. melman: Today, it's all about showing off^What we call the desire for closeness has gone so far that we have to show our guts, and the inside of our guts, and even the inside of the inside. There are no longer any limits to the demand for transparency. The surprise comes in the form of television programs that bring together a lay audience to debate an extremely delicate or intimate issue, such as sexuality after the age of sixty, which is undoubtedly a fascinating topic: people bare themselves in front of the cameras with a lack of modesty that they

would necessarily be able to show in a doctor's office. The presence of spotlights and

cameras acts as an imperative that no one can refuse, as if we were facing a torturer to whom we must confess everything, including what we haven't done. And that's extraordinary.

This is part of this new economy. Today, the gaze is a kind of torturer before whom nothing can be hidden. Our so-called investigative journalism frequently indulges in mudslinging and exhibitionism. Much to the delight, it seems, of readers who are happy to learn that a powerful man has a mistress: big deal! Whether he has a private life or not, how does that affect or determine his political actions and the positions he may have taken? There is something childish about this voyeurism. We are familiar with Bentham's famous story of *the panopticon*. This brilliant man had perfectly predicted how the world we live in would function: all it takes is a glance, a guard, to see the whole picture; all the guard has to do is stand in that place and enjoy a panoramic view of the fate of his contemporaries, as if it were something original and worthy of interest.

J.-P. Lebrun: It is in this position, that of the guard, that television viewers place themselves; those who watch are automatically in that position...

CH. Melman: There you have it! The gaze of the omnivorous viewer.

1. Bentham's *panopticon* is an architectural design invented by the famous English jurist and philosopher (1748-1832), which Michel Foucault revisited in *Discipline and Punish* (Gallimard, 1975). It is a prison model consisting of a ring-shaped building constructed around a central tower; the tower has large windows and the cells in the building are glazed from floor to ceiling

such a way that a guard can observe the interior of all the cells from the tower.

J.-P. Lebrun: Basically, it's as if we believed that with this new way of operating and the new possibilities it opens up, we could leave the metaphor behind, no longer inhabit language, no longer be automatically caught up in speech...

CH. Melman: Certainly, since French is tending to become more iconic than verbal, images—let's come back to this—no longer function as representations, but as presentations. Linguists would do well to take an interest in this language that is emerging on the Internet, the language used for exchanges between Internet users who do not know each other. A language, based on English of course, is currently *being formed*. The predicted globalization will not happen without passing through this stage, through this language with its already notable or predictable characteristics. These could prove decisive for our psychological future if this language were to become the dominant language.

J.-P. Lebrun: A *newspeak*, then, very much of our time. But what would its characteristics be?

CH. Melman: That of being a precise language, i.e., referring each time to the specific object—a word/thing—that brings Internet users together. Whether we are talking about motorcycles or postage stamps, or exchanging erotic remarks, the object being referred to is there, it is what we are celebrating and it is around it that we gather. The language is unambiguous, direct, and raw. If one of these internet users decided to write poetry, the others wouldn't understand, and communication would break down. Language must therefore be as precise as the instructions a manufacturer gives to its customers: clear and technical.

Where has authority gone?

j.-p. lebrun: You said that there were only practices left, and now you're talking about a purely technical language. Basically, what's disappearing in this new economy is the place of what escapes, the place of transfer, the place of the sacred, the place of respect. Could this also be the place of authority, which is thus being ousted?

ch. melman: Yes, the place from which command and authority are legitimized and maintained. I'm not going to get into an easy distinction between power and authority here. When someone claims power, you know, it's always in reference to what would be authority, not necessarily displayed. In any case, it is a reference on which power is based. Today, it seems that with the disappearance of the boundary we mentioned, authority is also lacking. In our culture, the connection between the place of authority and the place of the sacred seemed self-evident. The place of authority was both the place where the divine was hidden and the place from which commands could be legitimately issued. The connection was not a problem for anyone, which is why, for centuries, power was theological and political. Politics was necessarily theological, because power, by delegation, came from God. Secular republics have never completely rid themselves of this legacy.

J.-P. Lebrun: They took up this model, even if they emptied the heavens...

Ch. Melman: Of course. That's the model they adopted. Other words were found, such as "homeland," to refer to the sacred authority that had to be respected. Orders given could refer to the preservation of this authority.

J.-P. Lebrun: If I understand you correctly, it would seem that current progress, since you use that word, also risks bringing about the end of politics!

Ch. Melman: But that is exactly what we are witnessing. Political life is barren, there is no longer any ideological or even utopian conception, no slogan or project. There is no longer any political program. Our politicians are turning into managers, to the point where, quite logically, a great people like the Italian people are putting someone who has made a name for himself as a businessman in power. It all seems perfectly reasonable: if he has managed his own affairs so well, why shouldn't he be able to manage those of his country?

J.-P. Lebrun: This place of the sacred, of authority, which has been emptied, erased, is it not simply the place of what we analysts call the phallic instance?

Ch. Melman: It is precisely this, the phallic authority, that has been eliminated. And this is made very explicit in the novel form, for example in best-selling novels, which have an agenda: the elimination of sex. I am thinking in particular of Houellebecq and his *Elementary Particles*. It is indeed sex that complicates our lives, that makes them ugly, dirty, obscene, unaesthetic. Biology and artificial fertilization, we are told, will finally rid us of it. I don't see why this wouldn't be possible. Why should we inevitably be burdened by this issue that causes us so much trouble? We could try playing the harp instead; it's better than wasting time in marital disputes...

What place is there for the subject?

J.-P. Lebrun: But at the same time, it is the place of subjective division*—that irreducible uncertainty, because it is structural*, which specifies the subject by the fact that he has speech, the price he pays for language—which is eliminated...

Ch. Melman: You're right. Here's another feature of the new psychic economy: there is no longer any subjective division *, the subject

is no longer divided. It is a raw subject. To speak of a divided subject is already to say that it questions its own existence, that it introduces into its life, into its way of thinking, a dialectic, an opposition, a reflection, a way of saying "No!" Today, we hardly see any expression of what might be called subjective division.

J.-P. Lebrun: So, might we not fear that there is no longer any room for a true subject?

Ch. Melman: There is room for a subject, but a subject that has lost its specific dimension. It is certainly no longer the subject that belongs to this *ek-sistence*, this internal exteriority, which gave it a certain distance, a view of its life, of the world, of its relationships, and of possible choices. It has become a whole, compact, undivided subject...

J.-P. Lebrun: Which is universalized? The same for everyone? So also a trivialized subject?

CH. Melman: Yes, it is the common, average, ordinary subject.

J.-P. Lebrun: Does the disappearance of this place of subjective division, of this limit, bring us back to purely instinctual knowledge, to a being whose behavior is predetermined?

ch. melman: That would be ideal, and you're right, it would be a form of fulfillment, since it would no longer be necessary to determine or choose one's actions: they would be predetermined, as in animals. What a relief! All we would have to do is go with the flow.

This is something that could also be considered progress. We would no longer have to worry about subjectivity, since we would be able to remove this limitation, even if, of course, doubts would then creep in about the reality of our world. How do we know that we are in reality? When we wake up in the morning, how do we know that the dream has ended? It is undoubtedly because we come back into contact with a form of disappointment that

organizes our relationship with reality. However, if this type of disappointment is lacking, if it no longer supports our reality and its validity, then the question obviously arises: are we not always in a dream, are we not always in a realm where everything seems possible?

The progress I am talking about—and I do not use this term ironically, because there is no reason not to use it in this context—is consistent with that of our economy. The economy is able to provide us with ever more wonderful objects, ever more capable of giving us both material and narcissistic satisfaction. Thanks to these objects, we no longer have to be satisfied with representations, but with the authentic itself, with the object no longer represented but actually there, present in reality. Is not the liberal ideal to promote mutual enrichment by freeing exchanges from any regulatory reference? At its core, therefore, is a dual relationship, free of constraints, whose effects on the psyche seem obvious.

It is in this field, in this spirit, that I situate the place occupied today by cognitive theory, because it is precisely organized on this principle. The direct learning of access routes, both to the object and to oneself, must be sufficiently effective and competent to ensure a more or less happy and uncomplicated trajectory.

It is true that this relationship with a system where limits are thus removed considerably simplifies the psychological task of each individual. To achieve satisfaction, it is no longer necessary to go through the dysfunction I mentioned, which is of course a source of neurosis—or psychosis—since it is normal to defend oneself against it when one has to assume a subjective identity and a more or less stable and coherent relationship with objects. It is therefore no longer inevitable to take these complex and painful paths, to face these psychological crises, these mental crises, in order to achieve

a satisfaction that, after all, clearly has value, interest, and power. At the same time, problems of sexual identification and the concern to take one's place in the field of duties assigned to each individual, including the duties of memory, are greatly simplified.

Sexual pleasure—and this is one of the effects, in my view, of this change—which until now has been presented as the standard for all other pleasures, that is, what gave them their measure and allowed the various official pleasures to be relativized, now occupies a common, ordinary place among the others. It has lost the privilege that surprised Freud and the early Freudians of being the organizer of all so-called partial pleasures, of being, in a sense, at the top of the edifice. Today, sex can be treated as an official or instrumental pleasure like any other.

Progress... really?

J.-P. Lebrun: Your words seem paradoxical to me. You speak of progress, of the fact that, based on the observation that the sky is empty, we have freed ourselves. And at the same time, you describe the consequences of this evolution, which are not, to say the least, something to rejoice about!

Ch. Melman: Progress, as we know, always comes at a price. It is the source, as I said, of great freedom: no society has ever known such free expression of desire for everyone, such ease in finding a partner... Apart from pedophilia, which is a reserved area—for how long, one wonders!—it is quite clear that everyone can publicly indulge all their passions and, what is more, demand that they be socially recognized, accepted, and even legalized, including sex changes. This is a tremendous freedom, but at the same time it is absolutely sterile for thought. We

has never thought so little about anything! This freedom exists, but at the price of what would be the disappearance, *the Yaphanisis* of thought.

This concerns us directly in our clinical practice. The modern difficulty of the couple, whose contract has become commercial and legal—like a market economy contract—and has imaginatively replaced the symbolism of exchange, is having to ensure the surplus enjoyment promised by the market. But the alternation between presence and absence—because the two partners are not always together—implies a periodic drop in tension that can easily be experienced as a loss. The young people who come to see me sometimes inspire a certain emotion in me, when I see how they have managed to organize themselves. Take, for example, the extremely likeable 25-year-old musician I am currently seeing. He earns a meager living from his music and tells me about his exchanges with his girlfriend. These exchanges are both admirable and pathetic. When he comes home, she complains, "You're late, I've been waiting for you, dinner is overcooked, etc." " He apologizes, asks for forgiveness, understands perfectly her effort, her unrewarded effort and her boredom while waiting for him, but he had an obligation, he apologizes and continues on the path of contrition and remorse for her. Then, after a while, it becomes, "Yes, but still, you have to respect my life a little! If I was late, it's because I also have things to do, obligations, that I probably couldn't have done otherwise, as you can imagine. You shouldn't encroach on my own needs, or even my own pleasure, and interfere with what I might want to do." Then, of course, the ping-pong resumes in the other direction.

This search for the right balance between them seems both pathetic and endearing to me, because they have genuinely decided to free their lives from any reference to a kind of traditional set of positions and rhetoric specific to couples, and they

They try to come up with a new and redeeming way of talking, one that is fairer, where everyone truly respects each other. They spend a considerable amount of time, which ultimately becomes very conflictual, constantly trying to find the right balance in their relationship, the right compromise, if you will. And how will they find it? This brings us back to a type of limit that is not written anywhere, but is nevertheless at work and active. This man and woman, who could enjoy each other's company after leaving work, will spend an infinite amount of time discussing not themselves, but their relationship and the right position of what is called the scourge—and that is indeed the right word!—in a balance.

It is easy to deduce the price that must be paid for this new economy. Perhaps it is better to take stock of it and know what it is.

Human nature?

J.-P. Lebrun: We come back to having to think about what makes humans unique...

CH. Melman: Indeed. Nevertheless, I would not want you to think that I am defending the idea of human nature. On the contrary, I have emphasized the fact that we are denatured animals, and that this is the whole problem. If we had a human nature, in other words if we could rely on what is innate, instinctive, spontaneous, our task would be greatly facilitated. This new psychic economy aims precisely to correct this "flaw." The great moral philosophy of today is that every human being should find in their environment what they need to be fully satisfied. And if this is not the case, it is a scandal, a deficit, a wrong, a damage. Thus, as soon as someone expresses any kind of claim, they are legitimately entitled—and, if not, the law is quickly changed—to have their claim satisfied. A woman, for example, protests against the unequal treatment she receives in the education of her children, and

immediately the law must be changed and her right to parental authority recognized.

This can be observed in all areas of life. So, is this a new philosophy or not? In reality, we are returning to the sensualist philosophy of 18th-century England. It is amusing to see how, without any particular reference to it, its precepts are being realized today. Why, moreover, should we not have the right to find what satisfies us in our environment, regardless of our customs? If a homosexual couple wants to get married, on what grounds could anyone oppose it? If a transsexual asks for a change of identity, what authority would you refer to in order to refuse? Or if a woman in her sixties wants to have a child, on what grounds would you turn her away? In the current situation, as long as you have such a desire, it becomes legitimate, and it becomes legitimate for it to be fulfilled.

J.-P. Lebrun: Precisely, are we going to refuse to bear the consequences of being—as you just pointed out—"denatured animals"? If, as psychoanalysis teaches us, it is not the object but the lack of an object that organizes human specificity, if this object—this "Thing" that the mother most often uses as a metaphor—must be lost for the human to emerge, and if, as you argue, the place of the limit is established by this loss, then to contravene it would be tantamount to committing incest. Would you therefore endorse the idea that we live in an incestuous society?

CH. Melman: To put it that way would be problematic. In any case, it is clear that we live in a society where the manufacture of objects designed to satisfy bodily orifices has become a kind of requirement and is obviously popular with the general public. These are wonderful objects, capable of saturating the visual and auditory orifices to the point of exhaustion. Today, extraordinary sounds are manufactured that we no longer hear only with our ears,

but with our entire bodies—the body vibrates with the low frequencies that pass through it like rays. These are manufactured, artificial pleasures that are part of the products of the new psychic economy. They are likely, through a reversal, to prevail over sexual pleasure since, ultimately, these orifices of pleasure, which Freud said were pregenital, may well take precedence over sexual pleasure, which is obviously more random, except when it is aided by stimulants, which also happens.

An economy that encourages incest?

J.-P. Lebrun: So sexual pleasure is no longer a reference point, no longer a limit?

Ch. Melman: It is no longer a boundary and, in any case, no longer a yardstick for pleasures. From now on, there is no more yardstick for pleasures than there is for currencies.

J.-P. Lebrun: Hence the interest in necrophilic pleasure, for example...

ch. melman: For example. Or for bodily pleasures, muscular pleasures, all this bodybuilding in our so-called developed societies.

J.-P. Lebrun: Should we say that sexual enjoyment is regulated by castration, while other forms of enjoyment are regulated solely by deprivation and frustration, as I believe I heard you say during a symposium on "Constructions in Analysis [8](#)"?

CH. Melman: No, what I said about "constructions" is that they establish the subject of frustration or deprivation in the field of analysis, not the subject of castration. Because a subject's fantasy * 9 is always unconscious, and it is difficult to see how the unfolding of a story could generate an unconscious subject... It can establish the subject by designating the object of its demand.

or the object of which he has been wrongfully deprived, but not his fantasy. Here we touch on the realm of reality, and to want to provide the key to the fantasy would be to prevent the analysand from accessing it. It is one thing for a subject in analysis to uncover the nature of his fantasy; it is quite another to offer him a formula for it. So, is there a possible orthopedics of sexual desire? And why should there be one? That is, ultimately, the question.

J.-P. Lebrun: We would find ourselves swept up in a voluntaristic movement: now that we have identified the mechanisms and functioning of psychic reality through psychoanalysis, we might think we are in a position to manufacture it. This, of course, is not feasible! Voluntarism does not allow us to move from the imaginary * to the symbolic *. It can only lead to a reinforcement of the imaginary...

ch. melman: Exactly. That's exactly right!

J.-P. Lebrun: Would you say, then, that we are faced with a psychic economy which, without being incestuous, nevertheless "pushes" towards incest?

ch. melman: That pushes towards incest? Undoubtedly, as we have already said, but an incest that does not need to be realized, in its classic figurative form, that is, a relationship with the mother, in order to exist. This representation is no longer necessary for incest to exist. Without limits, there are no longer any prohibitions or objects that become symbolic.

J.-P. Lebrun: That's true, it's more complex, since, in effect, there is no longer any need to go through the act itself. This sheds light on what you say elsewhere about the father, about the questioning of his legitimacy. You rightly point out that the figure he takes on is that of the forbidden, the hindrance, the disruptor. He is no longer understood as the one responsible for linking desire to the Law
*, as Lacan said.

ch. melman: The function of the father is to deprive the child of his mother, and thus to introduce him to the laws of exchange; instead of the cherished object, he will later have to come to terms with a semblance *. It is this operation that prepares the child for social life and the generalized exchange that constitutes it: whether it be love, therefore, or work. But the problem with the father today is that he no longer has authority or a reference function. He is alone, and everything invites him, in a way, to renounce his function and simply participate in the party. The father figure has become anachronistic.

Envy rather than desire

J.-P. Lebrun: You mentioned cinema earlier. Often in today's films, the father is no longer represented, or he is voiceless or absent. How, then, does the question of desire arise?

CH. Melman: Desire today is sustained more by envy than by reference to an ideal. In other words, it depends above all on the image of the similar, insofar as the similar is the possessor of the object or objects likely to arouse my envy. Desire is normally organized by a symbolic lack. But the lack that arises in the relationship to the similar is only imaginary. To be symbolic, it would have to be related to some Other instance * where it would find its justification. If desire can no longer be sustained by an Other referent, it can only feed on the envy provoked by the other's possession of the sign that marks their enjoyment. It then becomes a mere social accident, which egalitarianism must repair; for it is scandalous that some have more than others. A major French evening newspaper published the sums that the heads of large companies receive through their stock options. It published them with the intention of throwing these people to the wolves: "You see! What injustice! They earn so much money while you

only have a modest salary..." It is the envy provoked by these incomes that is at stake, not the question of judging them. What is scandalous is that there can be envy, and therefore desire. We should even try to eradicate envy!

J.-P. Lebrun: And what if we actually managed to eradicate envy?

CH. Melman: I don't think we'll ever get there. It only takes a tiny difference to provoke envy. What's striking is how primitive and foolish the process is. Instead of respecting the fact that envy and desire exist, which are, after all, the great driving forces of society and thought, today we see a denunciation of all asymmetries in favor of a kind of egalitarianism that is obviously the very image of death, that is, of entropy finally realized, of immobility. You see, we come back to the exhibition we were talking about earlier, to the fundamental death wish behind this whole affair, to this desire for everything to stop... This goes hand in hand with the collective liquidation of transference, but also with the liquidation of the reference to the phallic instance, which until now has been experienced as the great organizer of our entire psychic organization.

j.-p. lebrun: In short, we are only in the early stages of this collective logic in society. Once again, I find it difficult to endorse your term "progress"...

ch. melman: The undeniable progress is to have understood that the sky is empty, that in the Other *, there is no one and there is nothing. That is progress...

j.-p. lebrun: Basically, it's as if we haven't metabolized the consequences of this progress?

ch. melman: We haven't metabolized them at all. Until now, progress has always consisted in pushing back the limits of the power of science and, in a remarkably synchronous manner, the prohibitions of morality. But in both areas, these limits

no longer have any real substance, except for a fleeting one: this is the price of success. As a result, progress no longer leads to new lands where, at least for a time, a new and easier life could be built, but to swampy areas that serve only as a foundation for uncertain and unstable subjectivities, anxious to find solid ground again. Launched at full speed, the Progress Express is thus hurtling towards an unmarked destination. We should at least ask ourselves where that destination is. Instead, we simply enjoy this progress in a way that glosses over the lessons to be learned from it. To observe that the sky is empty, to say that there is nothing in the Other, does not mean that the Other is abolished. We are confusing things. The Other remains the Other, remains our partner, even if there is no one to give it authority. And this is where we make the small shift that confuses everything.

J.-P. Lebrun: What can psychoanalysis do about this, other than point it out, make it visible?

CH. Melman: As usual, it can do nothing, at least not directly. Moreover, psychoanalysis has even contributed greatly to this state of affairs through its dissemination in the social milieu. There has been an interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis that has led to this situation and served as its ideology. It is quite clear that Lacanian psychoanalysis, on the other hand, cannot be blamed in this regard, to the point that Lacanians, as you know, are increasingly presented today as reactionaries, which is quite comical.

J.-P. Lebrun: You say "Freudian psychoanalysis." Are you thinking, for example, of the spread of the recognition of infantile sexuality?

ch. melman: With the spread of Freud's ideal, namely that ["is](#)civilization sick" was linked to the excessive nature of the moral restrictions imposed on it. Freud must be delighted that he was heard. For him, the malaise in civilization was linked to

the excessive repression of sexual urges; it is clear that today, the massive lifting of repression and the crude expression of desires could have cured it. Once sexual morality is relaxed, everyone can feel much better in their world. Which at the same time makes it uninteresting! Like those people in big cities who get together in the evening to rollerblade, forming temporary herds of people who enjoy the same thing at the same time, in the same place, and contemplate themselves in the image of others. Because if I rollerblade alone in the city, how can I know if I'm enjoying it? It's not certain! But if there are a thousand or more of us skating together, then I know what pleasure, what a thrill—it's the right word—I'm getting.

J.-P. Lebrun: You mentioned the necessity of disappointment, which is always essential to ground our sense of reality.

CH. Melman: Disappointment today is grief. In a strange reversal, what has become virtual is reality, as soon as it is unsatisfactory. What founded reality, its mark, was that it was unsatisfactory, and therefore always representative of the flaw that founded it as reality. This flaw is now relegated to a mere accident, a momentary, circumstantial inadequacy, and it is the perfect image, once ideal, that has become reality.

The return of authority?

J.-P. Lebrun: Do you think that this whole evolution is paradoxically an invitation to the return of the authoritarian father figure?

Ch. Melman: Certainly. This kind of situation has always led to a backlash, a return of authority, most often in a despotic form. Will this be the case again? It is possible, because the current situation is untenable. And we can

fear, as a natural development, the emergence of what I would call a voluntary fascism, not a fascism imposed by some leader or doctrine, but a collective aspiration to establish an authority that would relieve anxiety, that would finally tell us again what to do and what not to do, what is good and what is not, whereas today we are in a state of confusion.

J.-P. Lebrun: Listening to you, I am reminded of a television program called "The Weakest Link." Ten contestants must answer a series of questions and, at each round, decide which one of them is the weakest link to be eliminated, on the grounds that they have not performed well enough, while the host regularly repeats: You could have won ten thousand francs, but you only won three thousand! So there is this invitation to take responsibility for each other. Is this an example of what you call voluntary fascism?

ch. melman: That's right! That's exactly it! In fact, thinking is increasingly taking the form of this voluntary fascism. It has become extremely difficult to defend a position that is not correct, in other words, a position that does not go along with this implicit philosophy that anyone, regardless of gender or age, can have their wishes fulfilled in this world. Any reflection that seeks to question this implicit assumption is *a priori* barred, forbidden.

J.-P. Lebrun: Since we are talking here about the price to be paid collectively for the emergence of this new psychic economy, can we also ask what its consequences are for the different instances of the psychic apparatus?

Ch. Melman: Very briefly, the price to be paid concerns the subject, the ego, and the object. By crossing this boundary, the subject—the unconscious, the desire-driven being—has lost its shelter. It has lost its home, its stability, but also the place that gives it meaning.

allowed us to hold on. Today, we may well be dealing with subjects—and in a way that seems physiological—that are not, as we were accustomed to, defined and fixed once and for all, including in terms of character traits, paranoid or whatever you want to call them, but rather with subjects who are flexible and perfectly capable of changing, moving, transforming themselves, and embarking on diverse careers or experiences.

The subject has thus lost the position from which he could oppose, from which he could say, "No! I don't want to," from which he could rebel:

"The conditions imposed on me are not acceptable to me, I'm not going along with this." In any case, this subject lacks what used to be the place from which contradiction could arise, the ability to say no.

Today, however, social functioning is characterized by the fact that those who say "No!" generally do so for categorical or corporatist reasons. The traditional ethical, metaphysical, and political position that allowed a subject to orient their thinking in relation to the social game, in relation to the functioning of the City, seems to be remarkably absent.

J.-P. Lebrun: You mention flexible subjects, that is, subjects that no longer have a foundation...

CH. Melman: Precisely because they no longer have this place, they are capable of lending themselves to a whole series of domiciles. They have become strange tenants capable of inhabiting positions that are *a priori* perfectly contradictory and heterogeneous, both in their ways of thinking and in their choice of partners—including the gender of their partner or their own identity. Because, ultimately, why should we be condemned by our birth to a predetermined path, like that of the stars, once and for all? Why shouldn't we have a path that is not only zigzagging but also allows for breaks, hiatuses, changes of direction, several lives in one, and several different personalities?

Depression for all

J.-P. Lebrun: And at the level of the ego?

CH. Melman: At the level of the self, and this concerns our psychoanalytic clinic more directly or more immediately, it is obviously the validity of each person's presence in the world that is being discussed, debatable, since it can only be verified insofar as one is successful, that is, insofar as one's participation in the social game or economic activity is effectively recognized. In the absence of a reference point or referent—whether ancestral or otherwise, it doesn't matter—that allows the subject to assert their validity and stamina, their tone, despite the vicissitudes of their social destiny, this recognition is obviously lacking. At the same time, the subject, or rather the self, finds itself exposed, fragile, prone to depression, since its vitality is no longer organized and guaranteed by a kind of fixed, stable, assured reference point, a proper name, but needs constant confirmation. The inevitable ups and downs of this journey mean that the self can very easily become deflated, in free fall, and therefore exposed to what we all have to deal with, the frequency of various depressive states.

J.-P. Lebrun: The famous generalized depression, *La Fatigue d'être soi* (*The Fatigue of Being Oneself*) described by sociologist Alain Ehrenberg [11](#)?

CH. Melman: If you like. Energy levels are normally maintained through a relationship with an authority whose benevolence may seem guaranteed, assured. If there is no longer an ideal authority, your energy levels will depend on chance, on circumstances. In other words, depending on whether your work, your relationships, your situations, your benefits, whatever you want, are satisfactory, you may think you are favored by an authority that no longer exists. But as soon as the results become more complex, you immediately feel disavowed and lacking in everything. What becomes the support of the self is no longer the ideal reference, but the

object. And the object*, unlike the ideal*, requires constant satisfaction in order to be convincing.

J.-P. Lebrun: That leaves the subject in a much more difficult position...

CH. Melman: Indeed. It seems that in France today, 15% of all people who seek help in hospital services are suffering from depression. Is there still a place for the unconscious in a world where total freedom of expression on a stage illuminated from all sides dispenses with repression? Freud would have been delighted to see his hygienic recommendations come to fruition. However, the emergence of this new symptom, depression in place of defensive neuroses, would certainly have caught his attention. Indeed, the lack of symbolic identifications leaves the subject with no recourse but to fight incessantly to preserve and renew insignia whose devaluation and renewal are as rapid as the evolution of fashion, while he himself is inexorably subject to aging, like his car.

J.-P. Lebrun: When it comes to the relationship with objects in this new psychic economy, can we talk about a split?

CH. Melman: In order to maintain the game of desire and prevent it from being crushed or stifled by the object that is supposed to satisfy it, it is not uncommon for this object to be split in two, for there to be two of them. Threesomes, it's true, are nothing new, but that's not quite what I'm talking about. What I mean is that I could only be satisfied with one object if the other were to fail me, if I were to miss it—and vice versa, of course.

J.-P. Lebrun: What you're saying has a clinical tone that's a departure from the usual dichotomy between love and desire...

Ch. Melman: I've met patients like that, who need two women so that there's always one who can be absent: one introduces the absence that makes it possible to desire the other.

J.-P. Lebrun: So you're saying that it's not organized according to the classic model of separation between love and desire?

CH. Melman: Not on the classic model, simply so that what happens with one is maintained by the absence of the other, so that one only takes on value because the other is absent. But at the same time, the current one also loses its value, since the real value lies with the one who is absent. So, a new change of partner to start the same back-and-forth again.

This type of arrangement seems quite common, including for women who present themselves as a possible alternative to an already established couple. It has a direct, immediate effect on our way of thinking, on the workings of the mind, insofar as it renews traditional logic. It is clear that, in this case, and to use the language of logic, a is in a sense the same as *not-a*; the object of satisfaction is in a sense identical to the one that is lacking. In this case, I desire my wife only because she can be negated, due to the existence of my mistress in this instance; and vice versa. Thus, $a = non-a$. This obviously results in the kind of confused reasoning that we find in our newspapers. It is striking that the logical concerns that were familiar and traditional to us are no longer, in a sense, necessary. Thought is polluted by what it refuses to discard and preserves in pure contradiction, which homogenizes without any concern for dialectics, what Hegel called *Aufhebung**.

Laws that we are still dependent on!

J.-P. Lebrun: To return to this question, what consequences might the emergence of this new psychic economy have for our social life?

Ch. Melman: I would make this observation, which concerns not only us as psychiatrists, but also everyone in terms of their civic participation. Would the world then be moldable to our whims, that is, to our wishes, to our legitimate desire to obtain greater satisfaction? And to obtain it in a less painful, less complicated, less problematic way than that resulting from our education and training? Does all this ultimately depend on our good will alone? Do we really have the freedom to transform and modify laws as we see fit? It seems that all it takes is a parliamentary majority, a popular movement, or ethical trends for prohibitions and restrictions to fall away—because the law must follow the evolution of customs—and for us to be able to quietly pursue this satisfaction in line with our aspirations.

However, it does not seem that we can shape the world in this way, as certain philosophies, such as Bentham's utilitarianism, have preached. Thus, we are now caught up in a great aspiration to this noble ideal: equality, which Tocqueville already denounced. However, as all practitioners know, equality in a relationship, whether friendly, sexual, or professional, can never be operational. We know, for example, that in a homosexual couple, even though they are similar and equality is an ideal, there will inevitably be a kind of asymmetry that will mean that one will not be in the same position as the other. Everything leads us to believe that when we have clones tomorrow, the same will be true.

The question raised by this small example is that, regardless of the laws in force, there is something that prevents provisions from being crossed, simply because of our good will, our courage, our determination. Where are these other laws—the Law—that we cannot see, yet which impose themselves on us? Could it be that these laws are the foundation of what constitutes our humanity, of what distinguishes us from the animal kingdom? Could it be that these are the laws?

For there are indeed laws on which we depend, and whose discovery by Freud shows, particularly through the practice of psychoanalysis, that they are those of language, insofar as it is the preserve of this strange species called the human species. We cannot, whatever the quality of our wishes, decide as we please.

I.-P. Lebrun: So the psychoanalyst is directly concerned...

CH. Melman: We would be victims of an impersonal and blind authority, condemned to choose between the frugal and difficult existence I mentioned and this luxurious, not to say lustful, existence that now seems permissible to us, to which we are even invited. If we were to speak in this regard of hope, of progress that would be specifically the fruit of our experience as psychoanalysts and not simply a response to a wish of the *vox populi*, however well-founded it may be, we could say that this hope should result from work on what these laws of language imply, the way in which they impose themselves on us, the types of inscription on which they make us dependent. For these constraints, these laws that we have hitherto interpreted as definitive, can open up possibilities, horizons, and other ways of writing. It is therefore by working on what ultimately seems to determine us that we might hope to find ways of establishing relationships with the world and with ourselves that allow us to escape this choice, this kind of dilemma. In this way

we might be less exposed to setbacks and backlash. For when such a valorization of pleasure occurs in a society, history has shown that we must expect consequences, backlashes that can take the form of the establishment of an authoritarian climate and measures, supposedly in response to popular demand.

Castration: necessity or contingency?

J.-P. Lebrun: It seems to me that we are indeed touching on a fundamental question with these laws of language that you mention. For they force us to ask ourselves what is permanent, what we are subject to, what determines us. Lacan, in his

"Note aux Italiens [12](#)," spoke of *human humus*: he argued that "knowledge designated by Freud as the unconscious is what human humus invents for its own perpetuation from one generation to the next." Are these laws of language those of human humus? And isn't talking about limits just another way of talking about castration *?

ch. melman: Castration is not necessarily the definitive law of humanity. That is why I speak of progress, because it is quite clear that the social evolution currently underway is part of the search for a defense against castration. We have reached the point where it is now possible to communicate using different types of language, such as the one I mentioned in relation to the Internet. Languages in which iconic value is of major importance, such as the Chinese or Japanese alphabets, for example, where a sign * can be read either through its phonetic expression or through its pictorial expression, that is, through what it designates, what it stands for, the object of which it is the sign. These alphabets fascinated Lacan, incidentally, because of this possible double reading and the type of culture they engender. All Europeans who have visited Japan have been surprised by this fact: there, one is immersed in jouissance. Castration

clearly does not function in the Japanese archipelago in the way we are familiar with.

J.-P. Lebrun: Does that mean that it does not function in a way that is familiar to us, or that it does not function at all? That is not the same thing. I am surprised to hear you say that castration might not be automatic...

CH. Melman: No, it is not automatic, if I may put it that way.

J.-P. Lebrun: Doesn't the fact that humanity is "caught" in language impose it?

CH. Melman: The fact that there is a hole in language does not necessarily condemn the creature to make that hole about sex... Why would it necessarily be about sex?

J.-p. Lebrun: Could you explain what you mean by this hole in language?

CH. Melman: The sign * refers to the thing. The signifier * can only refer to another signifier; it is this flight of the signifier that sustains the desire for "the thing" which, from then on, is lacking. The beings we love, the objects of satisfaction, are the plugs for the "hole" thus opened in our world by language, in the absence of this "thing" of which we have only the semblance left.

J.-p. Lebrun: Would that mean that for the first time we would separate the hole in language from gender difference?

CH. Melman: For the first time? Perhaps not! We have not always lived as we live now.

J.-P. Lebrun: However, there is no society that has organized itself outside of gender differences!

Ch. Melman: No doubt, but for other reasons.

J.-p. Lebrun: The question is nevertheless central. When it comes to same-sex marriage, for example, we psychoanalysts do not have to give a definitive opinion on the matter, but we can understand why a society might ask itself whether or not it should

respond to this kind of demand? It is worth noting that no social system has ever functioned without taking gender differences into account...

CH. Melman: Gender difference is not necessarily linked to castration. Castration introduces a dimension into gender difference that is not necessarily internal to sexuality. This is very uncertain territory. The question we need to ask is this: is the fact that the signified is sexual an effect of our culture, and in particular of our religion, or an effect of the structure

*? I would tend to say that it is an effect of religion. But let's not get too carried away, let's remain modest.

J.-P. Lebrun: It seems to me, however, that the question of human humus, to come back to it, needs to be worked on...

CH. Melman: Certainly. But you know that Lacan himself did not necessarily consider the unconscious to be an inexorable appendage of human humus.

J.-P. Lebrun: I would have put it the other way around: what Freud referred to as the unconscious is the way in which humans manage to pass on the soil that is specific to them from one generation to the next. Would you agree?

Ch. Melman: Yes. That also means that it is only a modality...

J.-P. Lebrun: Until we find another one...

CH. Melman: But I'm not looking for another one! In any case, there is a very strange formulation in Lacan that I have already pointed out several times. He found a passage in the Pentateuch of the Bible where it is said that the Hebrews were looked down upon because, after leaving some town or other, they passed through a village where the men had fornicated with women. And Lacan comments: "I wonder if what was being denounced here was not precisely the possibility of sexual intercourse?"

He did not make his assertion that "there is no sexual relationship" into some kind of fatality! He first noted that sexual relations can exist, and then that monotheism should therefore be blamed for this rupture. This leads us to imagine a time when castration was not a guarantee of desire and when discourse was not a pretense, when there was no pretense of being a man or a woman.

J.-P. Lebrun: You're even more subversive there...

CH. Melman: You know, others said this a long time ago.

J.-P. Lebrun: But I still have a problem with this. You explain very well how the current evolution can be considered progress, but, I insist, at the same time, all this seems to lead us to an impressive series of dead ends...

CH. Melman: Because you would like, and this is what is appealing, to be able to clearly state what is good and what is evil. Obviously, I am simplifying a little. That is not the issue. That is how it is!

1. This refers to the title of Lacan's seminar: "On a discourse that would not be a pretense," *The Seminar*, Book XVIII, 1970-71, unpublished.

Clinical effects

J.-P. Lebrun: Basically, why couldn't the clinical condition you're talking about be summed up as a common neurosis? Couldn't we, for example, talk about obsession? Why couldn't we talk about the effect of a massive obsession within society?

CH. Melman: I don't think we are in a situation of mass obsession. The obsessive always seeks to hide desire, whereas today we display it in public. I would not subscribe to that diagnosis.

J.-P. Lebrun: Don't you think the new psychic economy is linked to obsessive neurosis? There has been a lot of talk about desexualization, however...

CH. Melman: Obsessive neurosis is organized around the desire to cancel out sexuality. The new psychic economy, on the contrary, turns it into a commodity like any other.

J.-P. Lebrun: And we psychoanalysts are confronted with the clinical effects of this type of functioning...

CH. Melman: Clinical effects that have replaced others, that appear in place of others! Today, for example, we feel much less guilt...

J.-P. Lebrun: Sometimes there is none at all!

CH. Melman: And there is much less frigidity. When I started out, one of the major themes in psychoanalysis was female frigidity. It still exists, but it has become rarer.

J.-P. Lebrun: You mentioned this young couple who spend their time trying to find reference points from which they can feel more accurately recognized by each other. This is obviously an effect of the change we are talking about!

CH. Melman: It is one effect.

J.-P. Lebrun: The question is whether it is possible to go back, to avoid having to pay the price for these dead ends. It is not certain that this is possible for those who have already embarked on this process of change...

CH. Melman: No. That's not possible.

J.-P. Lebrun: So they will still have to devote this attention to it, this time which, you say, is of little interest...

CH. Melman: Absolutely. You know, as Lacan pointed out about progress, everything that is gained on one side is paid for on another. I know bon nombre de couples qui passent

literally all their time constantly questioning each other's mutual obligations.

J.-p. lebrun: On another note, this is also what teachers complain about. They say they spend 90% of their time negotiating and only have 10% left for teaching.

CH. Melman: In any case, these couples spend their time negotiating. They have become negotiators.

J.-P. Lebrun: That's what we call mediation, a term that has become so commonplace, isn't it?

CH. Melman: That's right! Exactly. Soon there will be mediator judges everywhere, because a new family code is being drafted. Couples will then consult them to resolve issues such as: "Come on, is it normal that I spend half an hour washing the dishes when the other person only spends 15 minutes on it?"

II.

A widespread perversion

J.-P. Lebrun: We have taken an initial look at the issue to describe the emergence of this new psychic economy. We could now try to refine our analysis. You said that we have moved from a culture based on repression, and therefore on

neurosis, to a culture that promotes perversion. But what do you mean by perversion in this case?

ch. melman: We could say that our desire is fundamentally perverse insofar as it is organized by a state of dependence on an object whose real or imaginary grasp ensures enjoyment. This grasp is real for women via the man's penis, imaginary for men via the woman's body. If we find it difficult to understand perversions, it is because we are all, in fact, normally very closely concerned by them. However, we do not fully understand why, as neurotics, we are not perverse, even though we are easily fascinated by perversion. The difference lies in the following: for the neurotic, every object is presented against a backdrop of absence, which psychoanalysts call cas-

. The pervert, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on grasping this object, refusing, in a sense, to periodically abandon it. In doing so, they enter into an economy that plunges them into a form of dependence on this object, different from that experienced by the "normal," in other words, the neurotic.

It is because of castration that the world of objects is so important to us neurotics, that is to say, every object evokes for us the phallic authority it represents, but without exhausting its presence or reality. This is why, for a man, a woman derives her value from the fact that she is the support for this phallic instance. This brings us back to everything that has been said about femininity as a masquerade, for example. It is what makes women wonder so much about what makes them valuable to men. We know that they readily ask themselves what a man wants from them, what he finds in them. A woman, on the other hand, has more direct access to the real object, that is, the penis, even if it is only there as a representative, if I may say so, of the phallus that functions in the unconscious.

In other words, for neurotics, all objects stand out against a background of absence. But perverts, for their part, find themselves caught up in a mechanism where what organizes enjoyment is the grasping of what normally escapes. They thus engage in a singular economy, entering into a very monotonous dialectic of the presence of the object as total—the absolute object, the true object—and then of its lack, its absence. It is either the total presence of the object or its absence. And it is this economy of its libidinal organization that governs the life of the pervert, whatever his perversion.

Perversion has therefore regularly distinguished itself by organizing the relationship with the other directly, openly, and provocatively, around and about the object—let's say, to put it simply, the phallus—which is conventionally forbidden. In other words, it is a matter of constantly exhibiting what is normally hidden, reserved, for example at the moment of romantic effusion, and of ensuring that, from the outset, the interlocutor is invited to the explicit, shared enjoyment of this object. Now, it seems that this has become, if not the norm, then at least common behavior. This mechanism contributes to the market economy by creating communities that gather around the same explicit object of satisfaction.

J.-P. Lebrun: We have just been talking about this object that must be present at all costs. Could it be this presence at all costs that is now crushing what you have identified, for example, as the place of the sacred?

CH. Melman: I would put it a little differently. This object is generally only evoked. An outpouring of love may bring us closer to this object, but it nevertheless remains veiled and enigmatic. It continues to be real*, and therefore outside the realm of reality. The change we are witnessing manifests itself in its immodest display. Immodest

not in the moral sense, but in the clinical and physiological sense. In other words, the object has shifted; it is now present in the realm of reality.

J.-P. Lebrun: So you place this object, in this new economy, in the opposite position to the one it occupies in repression?

CH. Melman: Repression is fueled and maintained by what is initially an original repression, itself organized by the fall, the disappearance, the eclipse of this object.

J.-P. Lebrun: So it is indeed a kind of inversion, a way of no longer allowing the dimension of loss to exist...

CH. Melman: It's not quite a reversal. Because a reversal would imply the reversal of a previous natural position. However, in perversion, this object only acquires its value because it first disappeared. It is not a reversal, but an original phenomenon of cancellation, or rather of defiance. A challenge to what organized social conventions around the ejection of this object from the realm of reality.

J.-P. Lebrun: Challenge is close to denial. Can't we evoke that dimension?

ch. melman: I don't think it's denial, because it's clear that if there weren't this operation that aims to be transgressive, the object would lose its value. It must retain the element of original sin that constitutes it, if I may put it that way. In perversion, if there were no longer any opportunity to be in sin, the object would lose its interest. The object must retain its original character, marked by absence and eclipse, with the perverse operation allowing this absence and eclipse to be challenged in a way. And it must show that, after all, it is perfectly possible to derive pleasure from something that is no longer just the approach to this object, but its manipulation. In other words, the pervert loves the Law!

The future of the "used"

J.-P. Lebrun: When you talk about perversion, do you mean that we are all becoming perverse? That perversion is now presented as an ideal? Is that what you mean?

CH. Melman: Absolutely! Perversion is becoming a social norm. I'm not talking about perversion with its moral connotation, that's not what I mean at all, but perversion with a clinical connotation based on the libidinal economy we've just described. Today, it is the basis of social relations, through the way we use our partners as objects that we throw away as soon as we consider them insufficient. Society will inevitably be led to treat its members in this way, not only in the context of working relationships, but in all circumstances. For its very organization will depend on it. The problem of prolonging life, for example, will raise questions that will have to be resolved. The elderly population will be a heavy burden on an entire generation. And that generation will have to find a way, with a veneer of honesty, to solve this problem, i.e., to discard what, after having served its purpose, has become obsolete, a source of expense with no return.

j.-p. lebrun: This will be well a question of used: that of "usagers" of social media...

CH. melman: I can clearly see this scenario unfolding: insurance companies paying premiums to elderly people who take out policies to ensure that their descendants inherit their assets, in exchange for euthanasia to shorten a socially costly life. It sounds abominable and monstrous. But we regularly see similar things happening. So why not this? We will develop all the arguments and theories necessary to justify it. There will even be volunteers; there already are. So

we'll start by accepting and legalizing euthanasia, and then from there...

J.-P. Lebrun: You closely link the way society is organized, its economy in the most basic sense of the term, and the new psychic economy. Is this link direct, fundamental?

CH. Melman: But because it is, in a way, a new relationship to the object, which means that the object is not valued for what it represents, for what it stands for, but for what it is. Until now, representation has normally been acquired once and for all: you are a man or a woman, you have the dignity of a man or a woman regardless of your age. In some cultures, this representation is even reinforced with age, since we are supposed to gain wisdom, knowledge, and experience as we grow older. And then you have another relationship, which is no longer based on representation but on the being of the object. This object is only valuable as long as its being is a source of benefit. As soon as it proves to be defective, it becomes a totally worthless object that must be sent to the scrap heap.

J.-P. Lebrun: Can we invoke a possible coexistence of the two regimes, that of being and that of representation? Or, on the contrary, are you predicting a general organization of society around this prevalence of being?

ch. melman: For the moment, everything seems to be moving in that direction. However, will there be any backtracking? It's difficult to predict, because the situation we are experiencing is unprecedented. Everything we are talking about has nothing to do with what the erotic life of the Greeks and Romans might have been like. When Socrates met a friend and asked him, "So, did you get laid with so-and-so the other day...", it was part of ordinary social or philosophical discourse. There was no hint of perversion. It was simply a completely different way of organizing one's sex life. What we are experiencing today—I say this

once again—is unprecedented, and no one can predict whether or not there will be a radical return to moral order.

In the United States, it is striking that Americans voted for a president who is supposed—wrongly—to represent this moral order. But this seems more like consolation or an alibi in the face of inevitable change than a genuine hope for an effective moral rearmament of society. On the one hand, there is a power that is supposed to be the guardian of moral order, which, incidentally, passes laws that contribute to it, and on the other hand, there is society, which is in fact continuing on its path in the direction mentioned above.

J.-P. Lebrun: This brings us back to what I was pointing out earlier. On the one hand, you talk about progress, and on the other, you suggest that the difficulties ahead are considerable. Let me extend my question: does this evolution depend on no one, or, on the contrary, does it depend on us? I get the impression that you are describing a process for which no one can be held responsible...

ch. melman: The process does not depend on anyone, in other words, on any ideology. It depends solely on the peoples whose accelerated, magnificent, globalized economic expansion needs to feed on the breaking down of timidity, modesty, moral barriers, and taboos. This is in order to create populations of consumers who are hungry for perfect, unlimited, and addictive enjoyment. We are now addicted to objects.

J.-P. Lebrun: You mention addiction and consumption. So advertising too?

CH. Melman: I heard about an advertising poster for a brand of shoes. It shows a naked man with a woman's shoe on his foot. It's superb, this inventiveness on the part of the advertiser. But it's obvious that if he had this idea, if it's a selling point, it's because this idea evokes something that was already there.

It anticipates and simply repeats what is already there, in potential, in virtual form. You can see how perversity is displayed directly on our walls, without any coercion.

Another example? The SNCF, a company that is still nationalized in France, organized an advertising campaign for trains. It boasted that every day at 7:32 a.m., passengers could see a woman at home, in her private space, through the window of their train car. Again, what is the selling point? One could say that the metaphor of travel, of movement, is reduced to its most essential and primitive meaning, that is, not only that of sexual travel but also that of promise: the train as a promise of sexual encounter. Our parents and grandparents would have dreamed of it, but they couldn't have imagined it. A study carried out by experts on the phantasmagoria of trains in the unconscious mind leads to its unabashed exploitation; that's the problem! You can no longer fantasize about trains once the fantasy—in the most common sense of the word—is there, splashed across the poster. There are surely lots of people who have taken the train seeing it as an opportunity to meet someone, to travel, telling themselves that they will be different on this trip and that they will meet people who are themselves different, far from their familiar surroundings... But with that on the poster, the fantasy is dead.

An economy of signs

j.-p. lebrun: So it would be an economy of signs, and no longer of language, of signifiers. Signs, as we have said, refer to things, while signifiers refer to other signifiers. The word that signifies refers directly to what is designated, while the word as signifier constantly refers to another word. Can you say a little more about this economy of signs into which we seem to be sliding?

CH. Melman: The example of the naked man wearing a woman's shoe shows us how a poster can refer directly to the phallus and to the idea of a possible transsexual exchange. In other words, the man will be a beautiful woman, and the beautiful woman wearing the shoe will also be a man. Representation has become the sign of the object rather than its metaphor.

J.-P. Lebrun: The first time I heard you say that, it was in relation to drug addicts. You said that drug addicts, without knowing it, were leaving one psychic economy for another. That the psychic economy they were leaving behind was the economy specific to language, the one established by language, and that they were leaving it for an economy governed by signs. And that it was this change that would make them strangers to social bonds, insofar as it is discourse, that is, what is supported by language, that establishes social bonds.

1. See Charles Melman: "Évaluation de l'action des drogues" in *Le Trimestre psychanalytique*, no. 2, 1997, issue devoted to the proceedings of the conference "Toxicomanies, les psychanalystes et la méthode chimique," organized by the International Freudian Association.

CH. Melman: What we call, from a psychological point of view, the poverty of drug addicts is in fact due to the fact that metaphors and metonymies no longer work for them. We are in a language that is a language of signs. Everything is a sign.

J.-P. Lebrun: In other words, everything refers precisely to this object that we think we can get our hands on...

CH. Melman: Exactly! The colors with which we see the world depend on this: the object is there or it is not there. Addressing others is also linked to this object that we share, which is present or absent. The language of the successful modern novel is a deliberately poor language; yet there is neither intellectual poverty

or poverty of writing, but rather a desire to express oneself through a language that is solely basic, supposedly direct.

The double use of the pharmakon

J.-P. Lebrun: You once expressed the idea, in Brussels I believe, during a speech to the European Communities, that drug addiction as we know it today has its origins in fertility control. Some found this a scandalous shortcut, but with what you are saying now, perhaps you could come back to this?

CH. Melman: There is a beautiful ancient concept, which our pharmacopoeia has obviously forgotten, called *pharmakon*, about which Jacques Derrida wrote a very beautiful

1. See C. Melman, "Drug addiction, a psychoanalytic study," in *Le Discours psychanalytique*, no. 6, October 1991.

article*. With *pharmakon*, the idea was that there is always one or more objects capable of curing a disease and which, at the same time, are poisonous. In other words, the object capable of curing our dissatisfaction—dissatisfaction with both the world and ourselves—is also poisonous. We need only recall this concept to question the place of drugs: absolute medicine that cures all ills—opium and morphine are remedies that have been used by great cultures—and which just as easily dispenses us from existence. Taking drugs is like experiencing a kind of death. Or rather, drug addicts are the living dead, or the dead who are alive.

J.-P. Lebrun: Which amounts to saying that the functioning of human desire is not congruent with comfort, with the pursuit of comfort...

Ch. Melman: Thank you for reminding me, but I think it's obvious, even a truism that is easy to verify. When you travel to any region, you can see very clearly

how people have sought to organize their lives in a kind of comfortable enclosure, with a small, well-protected, well-heated house, sheltered, isolated, with a relationship to others that I wouldn't say is established once and for all, but where ultimately the sexual relationship becomes perfectly secondary. On the other hand, desire is maximum discomfort. If there is no discomfort, there is no desire. Discomfort means that there is not what is needed, that things are not as they should be...

J.-P. Lebrun: We come back to this missing object...

1. J. Derrida, "La pharmacie de Platon" (Plato's Pharmacy), *Tel Quel*, nos. 32 and 33, 1968. This article was reprinted in *La Dissémination (Dissemination)*, Seuil, Paris, Tel Quel collection, 1972, pp. 69-198.

ch. melman: We don't agree with him, but in any case, we are put under tension precisely by what disturbs us. Whereas all human organization is designed to achieve maximum entropy. It is clear that the modern promotion of comfort, encouraged by science and potentiated by the market economy, is a defense against desire, because it is desire that disturbs and creates the greatest discomfort. Desire is that great tormentor that never lets us rest, forcing us to work, to run, to move, to break rules, to struggle, etc. In short, to live. Comfort, on the other hand, is a proponent of sedation, immobility, and immutability, replacing verticality with decubitus in a silence that foreshadows death instead of the noise of existence.

How can we escape adolescence?

J.-P. Lebrun: You seem to be suggesting that in this new psychic economy, the imperative of entropy is more intense, more demanding, and that it does not occupy the same place as in a social framework organized by repression. If I mentioned the discomfort of desire, it was so that you might perhaps question adolescence, which has not always been such a significant chapter in our individual histories as it is today. Adolescence is

is basically just that long period during which the subject passes from childhood to adulthood. In Houelle-becq's latest book, *Platform*, the first pages begin with: "My father died a year ago... you never *really* become an adult." Adolescence is precisely that time when the person who is not yet really a subject goes

1. The full text is: "My father died a year ago. I don't believe in the theory that you *really* become an *adult* when your parents die; you never *really* become an adult..." in Michel Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, Flammarion 2001, p. 11.

agree to occupy—or, on the contrary, refuse to occupy—one's place as a subject and assume one's desire. According to what you say, the new psychic economy risks making it more difficult to find one's place as a subject. Does it already have a significant influence on subjectivation?

ch. melman: Absolutely, everything we are talking about here plays on subjectivation. Not only do adolescents have difficulty finding themselves as subjects, but often they find nothing. Today, there is a conformism in the way adolescents dress, but also in what they say, which deserves our full attention. I recently saw a young woman who is no longer quite a teenager, she is twenty-two, but whose existence was a typical reflection of what we are talking about...

J.-P. Lebrun: Perhaps at twenty-two today, you can still very much be a teenager...

Ch. Melman: I mean that she doesn't do anything, she doesn't care about anything. Not about her social integration, her personal or professional future, or even her present. She lives in a studio apartment, where she sleeps during the day; in the evening, she goes out to clubs, completely neglecting herself, with episodes of derealization, but she doesn't complain about anything. Her mother brought her to me with a story about rape, which turned out to be a fabrication. As a result, she

was prosecuted for abuse of the legal system. When you see her, she is a beautiful, frank girl with no apparent psychological problems, and yet her condition is serious.

J.-P. Lebrun: The situation you describe is far from rare today.

Ch. Melman: That's what I told her mother. You asked me earlier about the pill. The pill is a way of disconnecting sex from childbearing. A child born in this way, programmed, owes nothing to anyone, not even its parents, since it is the product of an arrangement. This girl owes nothing to anyone. But the problem with symbolic debt today, through an interesting process, is that it is reversed, with the debtor becoming the creditor. We are familiar with the example of those unfortunate Third World countries whose governments, unable to pay their debts, are forced to seek additional credit in order to repay at least something! That girl was exactly like that. First of all, she didn't owe anyone anything, except that she had received a bill for her cell phone the previous month for eight thousand euros. That means she must have talked all day long—and that's no exaggeration

— on her cell phone, and if her mother hadn't paid the bill, she would have ended up in jail! She was putting herself in a position where, without a donation, she risked dying in her room. She wouldn't even turn to prostitution, because prostitution would mean entering into a mechanism of exchange. But she wasn't in any real mechanism of exchange. The initial debt, the symbolic debt, was completely canceled. She knew what sharing was, but not exchange. And when I said to her, "But you go to clubs, that costs money...", she replied, "We get in through friends, we don't pay... " "And then you go home and eat anyway?" "Oh, during the day, I sleep... I eat an egg, a

little bread when I have it..." That's why I say it's a serious issue.

J.-P. Lebrun: Here, you're bringing to light—and I don't know what to call it—a new clinical category of young people who, in the end, feel that they are entitled to everything...

Ch. Melman: That's what we used to call psychopathies.

J.-P. Lebrun: In these cases, there is obviously no demand. And the absence of demand is replaced by the spread of a kind of enjoyment...

ch. melman: I don't even know if it's jouissance!

J.-P. Lebrun: You wouldn't call it jouissance? Don't you think it refers to the jouissance that Lacan calls jouissance Autre *?

ch. melman: In the past, there was this distinction between partial object

- oral, anal... - and sexual objects, and also between partial enjoyment and sexual enjoyment, known as phallic enjoyment*. The types of enjoyment we are referring to are not partial because they are no longer part of an organized whole. They are independent and local types of enjoyment, free and anarchic in a way. This is the effect of a disconnection from what we call—and this is very important—common sense. In fact, this young girl is not particularly interested in anything, she doesn't read, she doesn't watch anything, she doesn't do anything...

J.-P. Lebrun: It is disconnected from phallic enjoyment, I understand that. But can it not nevertheless be qualified as Other enjoyment?

Ch. Melman: I don't think so, because Other jouissance is established by castration. There has to be castration for us to be able to evoke the Other dimension. There is no Other jouissance without a link to phallic jouissance. In this case, it is a disconnection from phallic jouissance, such that

that the jouissance in question no longer functions in solidarity and therefore cannot be referred to the Other.

J.-P. Lebrun: It has become autonomous.

CH. Melman: Exactly! So we cannot speak of Other jouissance. That would already be locating it in space, limiting it.

J.-P. Lebrun: You are talking about something that is clinically very serious, but which we can clearly see is very present—fortunately in a less severe form—in many adolescents. How do you view this? As a kind of defense mechanism for adolescents faced with a world that seems meaningless to them? Or rather as an inability to invest in themselves that they have been unable to acquire or develop, given their history? Which means that they are unable to adhere to the system of debt and exchange?

ch. melman: I would call it a lack of subjectivity.

J.-P. Lebrun: Would you say that, in the same way that there used to be deficiencies in childcare, there are now deficiencies in symbolization?

ch. melman: You could say that. Deficiencies concerning symbolic debt towards the Other*.

J.-P. Lebrun: But when you say that we are unable—or no longer able—to carry out the operation of subjectivation, isn't that a pessimistic statement? There are still quite a few people who are clearly still able to do so...

CH. Melman: Are they succeeding? I hope so... We often deal with subjectivities that are organized more by participation in collective hysteria * than by individual determination.

J.-p. lebrun: In any case, this ties in with the idea you mentioned just now: no common sense, no attachment to debt, and also no inscription in the body...

CH. Melman: No symbolic inscription in the body, indeed, hence the popularity of piercing and tattooing.

J.-P. LEBRUN: These are attempts to inscribe what, deep down, has not been inscribed so that it can anchor itself, take hold...

ch. melman: Yes, absolutely. I recently heard an Anglican bishop speak about the situation in Belfast. You would have thought he was saying exactly the same thing as us. This obviously raises questions for us: do our assessments reflect a fundamentally religious position? The answer we psychoanalysts can give is that it is not necessary to be religious to respect the order that governs us, although some people need this reference point. We can respect this order simply by knowing that not respecting it means sinking into barbarism. What we call barbarism can be defined in a very strict, very rigorous way; it is not simply a metaphorical expression to designate vaguely *l'étranger* or *le "Barbaros,"* the one who simply shouted "Bar-bar-bar!" Barbarism consists of a social relationship organized by a power that is no longer symbolic but real. From the moment that the established power relies on—has as its reference—its own strength, and seeks to defend and protect nothing other than its existence as power, its status as power, well, we are in barbarism. Can you think of a single recent major manifestation of the exercise of power in our world that is not a manifestation of barbarism?

J.-P. Lebrun: You raise a crucial point here. You argue that realizing that the sky was not inhabited represented progress. And now you declare, which could be confirmed by an obvious resistance on the part of religion, that some people need religion, or can only recognize their debt through religion. The question therefore arises as to whether, collectively, this

progress is acceptable. Is it really possible for many people to continue to respect this debt, which allows for subjectivation and the consequences of this relationship with the Other, without believing in a populated sky?

CH. Melman: I wouldn't know how to answer that question. However, I do see this: parents today are rushing to enroll their children in private schools in an attempt to instill a little common sense in them. If we had competent ministers of education, they could think about this. You know that in France, religious schools are overwhelmed and cannot meet demand. For my part, I would certainly not advocate a return to mass, church services, or synagogue...

Responsibility for the subject

J.-P. Lebrun: I understand. But this raises the question: should we go so far as to think that we are dealing with an irresponsible subject today? This would be in line with the very current desire to be recognized as a victim at the slightest opportunity...

Ch. Melman: You're right. The subject is not responsible, insofar as his subjective determination no longer stems from what would be a singular adventure, a singular choice, but from participation in collective hysteria. At the same time, it seems entirely legitimate to them to think that they owe their path, their destiny, to collective and external circumstances. The same community therefore owes them compensation for everything they lack, since it is through this community that they were conceived.

J.-P. Lebrun: What you say has been confirmed by the famous Perruche [13](#) ruling: if I was not born well, if I am disabled, society owes me compensation. It's a bit frightening!

CH. Melman: The recent Perruche ruling does indeed stipulate that it is not life, the fact of being alive, that justifies the existence of an organism,

even if it is defective, but its quality. It is this quality that determines whether life is valid or not. This point obviously raises ethical questions... and, of course, to use your term, in a frightening way!

J.-P. Lebrun: So there would be something eminently singular happening. We could say, if we were to use a computer metaphor, that it would be as if, when faced with a computer, we were shaking not only its functioning, its program, but even and above all the device itself...

Ch. Melman: Indeed, it is not the program that is being modified, but the hardware!

J.-P. Lebrun: If the subject's responsibility is no longer self-evident, won't that completely change the type of appeal, of request, that we make to the psychoanalyst, or even to any therapist? Some argue that there is nothing new to expect in this area. What do you think?

Ch. Melman: I recently saw a woman of a certain age who had not had a very happy life. She came to me seeking redress. She became aggressive when she realized that I was not trying to "repair" her misfortunes: the fact that her husband had left her with debts, that she couldn't find a job, that her daughter was ungrateful, that the employer she had found was underpaying her, that she suffered from headaches and insomnia. Everything was within the scope of her demands. One might think that this is a clinical type that has been around for a long time. I don't think so.

J.-P. Lebrun: How would you distinguish such a claim from the rather banal claims of someone who is hysterical?

ch. melman: The difference is that her claim seemed absolutely legitimate to her, without any duplicity, without any questioning of what it might mean. She assumed it entirely. It was not

a way of addressing others, it was the essence of her address, her very authenticity.

J.-P. Lebrun: How should one respond to this type of request, or rather demand? The analyst is disarmed, since there is no possibility of shifting the address...

CH. Melman: There is no answer. When this woman comes to me, it is with both this kind of painful complaint and a kind of astonishment, surprise, anger because I do not prescribe her the *pharmakon*. How come I don't give her the *pharmakon*? So she administers herself a whole range of products that she picks up here and there. If she comes to see the specialist, it's so that he can give her the *pharmakon*!

J.-P. Lebrun: This goes against a position that allows the patient to address the analyst...

CH. Melman: Yes, contrary to it. It is a transference that is immediately placed in the field of paranoid demands. And the evolution of the transference * in a relationship of understanding towards the demand could obviously only increase this paranoid dimension.

J.-p. Lebrun: Should we conclude that there is a kind of insurmountable gap between the apparatus of analysis and this type of functioning? Isn't that a bit pessimistic?

Ch. Melman: It's not pessimistic, it's just the way it is. What can you do? What could you explain to him?

J.-P. Lebrun: That's precisely the question I'm asking myself. How can psychologists who refer to analysis in their practice and very often encounter young people struggling with such difficulties find their way? In other words, in this case, and despite everything, what can be done?

CH. Melman: My answer is that there is nothing you can do. Except try not to expose yourself too much to the center of the target, because you

will inevitably trigger a paranoid claim, which will gain momentum. And which, in fact, will provide justification for the claim. Because dealing with a doctor who not only fails to cure, but also increases dissatisfaction...

J.-P. Lebrun: And you don't think that saying something, taking a certain position, could be useful for some people who have never had the opportunity to hear what an analyst has to say? Because if analysts also stand aside, who will take on the responsibility of being a point of contact for these people?

Ch. Melman: You can try... You know, there are many situations in which no one ever says anything! We mustn't believe that every time a problem arises, someone has to be there to intervene in a relevant way. But I fully approve of your courage in trying to say something...

Inevitable violence

J.-P. Lebrun: Although it is related to what we are talking about, we have not yet addressed the issue of violence. Except, of course, when you mentioned the risk of triggering a paranoid process just now. One could say that when the analyst, as in this case, is inadequately called upon, there is a risk of triggering a certain violence. But more generally, what place does violence occupy in this new psychic economy?

CH. Melman: Violence appears when words no longer have any effect. From the moment the speaker is no longer recognized. In a couple, violence begins when one partner refuses to recognize the other as a living, good-faith speaker. Living, therefore having their own economy, their own constraints. And considered, regardless of the disagreement, as

in good faith. When this recognition does not occur, the other person is not recognized as a subject, and violence ensues. You recently mentioned to me a meeting between two writers, an Israeli and a Palestinian, and you said that despite their completely different, incompatible interpretations of events in the Middle East, they recognized each other as being in good faith. This is a wonderful counterexample. Each recognizes that the other is caught in a situation where they cannot do anything other than what they are doing, or say anything other than what they are saying, that they have no choice as subjects. But in the era we live in, more and more often, the subject is not recognized because it was not established in the first place. So violence erupts at every turn, for everything and for nothing. A kind of violence that has become a common mode of social relations.

J.-P. Lebrun: Once again, there seems to be no way out of this situation. What you describe suggests that the subject no longer has the means to be a subject. Indeed, if it is the mechanics of the human "computer"—its hardware—that is damaged, and not the program, we would no longer have the means to be recognized as subjects. Everything then becomes much more complicated...

ch. melman: A trivial example is that of a good man confronted at home by neighbors who are making noise. This is a conflictual and paranoia-inducing situation, if I may say so, and a typical one at that. The neighbors are making noise without knowing that their noise can be heard on the other side of the wall. It's a typical situation—in one of my early texts, I talked about this phenomenon of the dividing wall—and it can drive the person bothered by the noise completely crazy. We have here practically a situation of experimental psychosis. The structural conditions of this case are obvious. You can only get silence from the Other, the big *Other*, if you are subjectively inserted into that Other. If there is noise coming from the other side, if there is noise coming from the Other, it is because

as a subject you are being denied, and this is how psychotics experience their hallucinations.

J.-P. Lebrun: You are taking us into very interesting and very disturbing territory. Because this sets in motion a process that we cannot see ending in anything other than disaster...

CH. Melman: It's not uncommon, to refer to the same example, for it to end with gunshots.

J.-P. Lebrun: So this new psychic economy would cause an increase in violence, but also a structural inability to regulate that violence, since symbolic efficacy is, in a way, denied...

CH. Melman: Yes, this increase in violence is reported in the press every day. As is the inability to deal with it or contain it. Cash transporters want police protection, but the police also want protection to enter the troubled neighborhoods. What solution can be found?

J.-P. Lebrun: Nevertheless, there has always been violence, aggression...

Ch. Melman: Not to this extent, nor in the same way. I often tell our psychoanalyst friends in Latin America that Brazil is anticipating what will happen in France and Europe: the formation of a civil society where the dividing wall, the border, runs through the very heart of that society. Where people lock themselves in their homes behind bars with armed guards. When you walk around Rio de Janeiro, you are struck by the number of houses protected by fences and security guards. When you are out and about, you never know whether you are crossing the "border" and therefore exposing yourself to violence. People live in a state of informal, "individual" and latent civil war... When, for example, an old lady has her bag snatched and ends up in hospital with a head injury. When a domestic worker returns to her miserable studio apartment to find the door broken down and her belongings stolen

stolen. When there are so many cell phone thefts, so many car thefts... it's a form of civil war. Between the criminal underworld and mainstream society, there's a kind of war going on! We don't talk to each other anymore, we're at war.

A knowledge society

J.-P. Lebrun: Is there a link between the current situation and the replacement of a society of power by a society of knowledge? Back in 1965, in the last two sessions of his seminar—still unpublished—on "Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis," Lacan raised the issue of the subject's relationship to the growing accumulation of knowledge. Do you see a link between what is happening today and this development? Could the new psychic economy be an effect of the particular difficulty of the subject in the face of the accumulation of knowledge?

ch. melman: You are right to ask this question. Because today's knowledge is digitized; it is no longer literate knowledge. As long as it was literate, we could still find meaning in it, but with digitized knowledge, this becomes difficult. Sitting in front of your computer, you depend on knowledge to which you no longer have access. You can no longer interpret texts, engage in hermeneutics or literature. Digitized knowledge is in the hands of a specialist, who depends on another specialist, who in turn depends on yet another specialist. And the second-level specialists are unaware of what the first-level specialists have put in place.

The success of science requires abandoning the use of everyday language in favor of the "exact" language of calculations, whose accuracy is, incidentally, ephemeral since it is subject to constant revision. This characteristic—mathematical writing subject to constant revision—contributes to the dismissal of texts that until recently were considered authoritative. This is to the benefit of what lends itself to

digital coding, particularly everything written in the field of commercial exchanges or trivial subjects.

J.-p. lebrun: Digitized, literate—how do you tell the difference? With digitization, we are dealing with the innumerable, since it only exists as zeros and ones...

Ch. Melman: Strictly speaking, yes. You find a tetragram '. How do you make sense of it? You have no recourse. You are foreclosed from this "text" as a subject. That's why I'm reluctant to sit down at my computer: I don't want to become dependent on knowledge and technology, which I then become a slave to.

J.-p. lebrun: I understand, but I don't immediately see the connection with the problem we're dealing with...

CH. Melman: People don't know all the information that computers, especially networked computers, possess, process, receive, and transmit. Big Brother is nothing compared to that!

J.-P. Lebrun: Listening to you, one wonders whether we should think that things were better under the religious or patriarchal model that has governed society until now. Would you agree with that?

CH. Melman: Under the religious or patriarchal model, things were different. They were certainly not better, since it is to this patriarchal and religious model that we owe our neuroses. So we can only say that things were different. Today, in fact, we are essentially witnessing a kind of massive acting out against psychoanalysis. Acting out, that is, analysis without transference. It is as if the way psychoanalysis had spread throughout society and the world of ideas had led to this strange result: an acting out against it.

J.-P. Lebrun: Are you saying that psychoanalysis itself, and what it conveys, is targeted by this change in the psychic economy?

CH. Melman: There is every reason to think so. Psychoanalysis was born out of a malaise in culture that Freud identified very clearly. When we read 19th-century novelists, those who wrote before Freud, we are struck by the impression that they are addressing someone who does not exist, or rather does not yet exist. Psychoanalysis has often been sought in novels; it would be more amusing to note that both novelistic writing and pathology seem to hint at a place, that of the future analyst, the place that Freud occupied. So it is not surprising to think that psychoanalysis, once articulated and returned to the social milieu where it acts as an agent interpreting what is happening, would have the effect I mentioned a moment ago. That is, to provoke a passage to action aimed at getting rid of the questions it raises.

III.

The misunderstanding of the father

J.-P. Lebrun: We have mentioned patriarchy, which is in decline. You talk about this very often, pointing to the discredit that the figure of the father suffers today. Has psychoanalysis played a role in this development?

Ch. Melman: The advent of psychoanalysis occurred—and undoubtedly became possible—at the very moment when the paternal figure

father figure was disavowed, or at least called into question and in decline. This would not have been the case—and indeed is still not the case—in societies dominated by religion. In strictly religious circles, I am thinking in particular of Islam, paternal power has remained intact. The emergence in modern times of a kind of demand for enjoyment, such as that which emerged after the First World War, following the horrific bloodshed it caused, can be seen as one of the aggressive "gestures" directed, albeit abusively and erroneously, at the father as the supposed occupier of the position of the interdictor. In any case, his debt had been largely paid. Today, we are only witnessing the end of a process that began long ago. Remember, when

Lacan referred to Claudel's work in one of his seminars, specifically to the Coûfontaine trilogy, where the humiliated Father appears. What he wanted to illustrate was precisely this decline of the father. What we are dealing with today, in this respect, is the tail of the comet.

J.-P. Lebrun: And yet, as you know, there is this criticism levelled at psychoanalysts, and especially at Lacan's work: it is said that, under the pretext of appealing to the laws of language or the symbolic order, they are advocating a return to patriarchy. How do you respond to this criticism?

CH. Melman: There is a massive misunderstanding about the paternal function. A massive misunderstanding that Freud's work has perpetuated, insofar as it led to this thoroughly unfortunate book, if we judge by the readings it has inspired regarding the father, *Moses, and monotheism*. If the establishment of an impossibility is a necessary step in accessing sexual desire, this establishment of a "cannot be" is experienced and at the same time interpreted as a prohibition. However, the father is not at all the one who prohibits desire, quite the contrary, as we have already said: he

is the one who makes access to desire possible. There is therefore every reason to believe that this condemnation that has emerged against the father, and which psychoanalysis has perpetuated through the conclusions drawn from works such as *Moses and Monotheism*, has above all allowed a condemnation of sexual desire to develop. This is where the error and misunderstanding lie.

J.-P. Lebrun: But today, sexual desire has been liberated!

CH. Melman: We have liberated it so much... that it is now sinking. What is happening when we talk about sexual liberation is no longer a matter of desire. Desire is now taking second place to a whole range of pleasures that are much easier to satisfy and much more economical. We could see a magnificent trick of "history" in this phenomenon: the decades-long denunciation of the father when what was really being denounced was simply sexual desire. Here again, I refer you to the literature. Contemporary man treats sexual desire as a mere bodily activity, rather ugly, dishonorable, unappetizing, unclean, immoral, and instead envisages, with the new techniques of procreation, a future of asexual reproduction. And this is where there is a fundamental misunderstanding. Freud was by no means a despiser of the father; quite the contrary, his position was to want to save him. We can see that it only takes a slight distortion for there to be immediate peripheral and networked consequences, since we are at the matrix level, if I may express it that way, or rather, in this case, at the patrilial level.

The other is not the stranger

J.-P. Lebrun: You just referred to Freud's *Moses* as an unfortunate work. Could you elaborate on that?

Ch. Melman: An unfortunate work because it ultimately places the father in the position of the stranger. Freud certainly did not have at his disposal this notion *of the Other, which* is central to Lacan, but it is quite another thing to situate the father as *the Other* or to situate him as a stranger. From a topological point of view, to refer to Lacanian theory, it is radically different. The stranger is someone who is on the other side, on the other side of this wall that can be represented by a "band" that is two-faced and has two sides, the front and the back. But if we situate ourselves, like Lacan, in another topology, that characterized by the "Möbius strip," which has neither front nor back, we are no longer dealing with a stranger at all. In the latter case, in fact, the one on the other side is not necessarily a stranger.

J.-p. Lebrun: Nevertheless, identifying Moses as Egyptian, as Freud did, means identifying him as a stranger, of course, but it also means situating the logical figure of the exception, and therefore the special place of the father...

CH. Melman: The logical figure of the exception brings out the dimension of otherness, not that of strangeness or foreignness. If the father is in an ideal position and the sons are separated from him by a break, which is "normally" the case, the sons can consider themselves to be in the position of the Other in relation to the father. It is not then that the father is Other, but that the sons experience themselves as Others in relation to the father. You can see how a tiny distortion in a reading can give rise to misunderstandings.

J.-P. Lebrun: So you want to emphasize that we must not confuse the position of the exception, which is occupied by the father and introduces otherness, with the position of the stranger?

Ch. Melman: The dimension of the foreign One is a definitive obstacle to any resolution of the transfer*. The biblical myth specifies this: it is the One for whom we work and sacrifice ourselves, without him necessarily

recognizes or loves you. His strength does not lie in the faith he inspires, but in the police who enforce his authority.

J.-P. Lebrun: Do we no longer participate in a common world?

CH. Melman: The resolution of the transfer is conceivable only through, not war, but the recognition of the fact that there is in the Other * a "one" that is purely a logical construct.

J.-p. Lebrun: So something that no one can lay their hands on, that no one can claim to own...

CH. Melman: Nor can anyone attribute intentions, an origin, or a history to it...

Patriarchy or matriarchy

J.-P. Lebrun: In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud describes how the transition from recognition of the mother to recognition of the father constituted progress. How do you analyze this progress?

CH. Melman: Freud does indeed make a remark, which is not his alone, that the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy was a step forward for humanity. Spiritual progress, mental progress, since we moved from the rules of evidence to those of belief. However, we must first understand the difference between these two systems. If we realize that they are based on radically different structures, we may be able to better understand what the signifier "progress" means here, and why we can indeed speak of progress. What is the basis for this difference in structure? As I have just said, we have moved from a system based on evidence and positivity, as underpinned by matriarchy, to another system where what matters and prevails is of the order of faith and refers to what we analysts call the symbolic pact.

Matriarchy regulates the question of cause and causality. First of all, with regard to fertilization, by saying that this

process is an obvious and utterly positive mechanism: the mother is the cause of the child. A regime is thus established in which the mother, as present in the field of reality—that is, as basing herself not on any mystery but on her own power, her own authority—finds herself invested with that power which is for all human beings the supreme power, becoming the phallic reference point. The mother thus becomes the embodiment of the phallus, and the child owes its genesis to the autonomous intervention of this power, which is embodied and present in the same way as the child in the realm of reality. This does not mean that the father, one of the two parents, served no purpose. But his role appears to be incidental, not at all necessary. Mother and child are therefore sufficient to ensure the continuity of a chain of generations which, as we can clearly see, has the advantage of being without mystery.

Thanks to this system, we are fortunate to be part of a world that can truly be described as positive, a simple world where words, signifiers*, refer directly to things and have no meaning other than the things themselves. And where the function of the antecedent sums up causality: what comes before is the cause of what comes after. We are in the realm of metonymy *, where contiguity organizes our entire world. The invocation of the father as a metaphor *, characteristic of patriarchy, effectively introduces a rupture in this seemingly happy simplicity, where everything is "natural."

The animal world—in other words, the natural world par excellence — obviously has a direct relationship with its object. In the animal world, there is no hesitation about how to behave, what object to choose, or the nature or specificity of the satisfaction sought and obtained. Sexual partners are very clearly identified and animals do not pose any ethical problems. This world, conducive to satisfaction that does not involve any "mediation" or work, has inevitably come to represent for our

humanity, a kind of ideal, a lost paradise, as Christians would say, since it was through a fall involving a decline, linked to divine punishment, that we left this Garden of Eden where everything was thus at our disposal.

The father is, of course, like the mother, present in reality, but he does not derive his power from himself. He derives it solely from being the metaphor for an instance that is in itself elusive, invisible, and occupies the field not of reality but of what Lacan calls the real, in other words, something inaccessible that has nothing "natural" about it.

"natural." Contrary to what we observed in the matriarchal system, the phallic instance * is now radically displaced, since it is no longer part of the field of reality. The father has become not the embodiment but the representative of this instance.

The difference between the two systems therefore lies in the following: with patriarchy, it is the dimension of the real that is introduced into the field of the psyche, of mental speculation. And with it, we also introduce an effect that could be described as traumatic, because it appears that this operation implies that the objects with which I could satisfy myself will never be anything more than substitutes, semblances. There is therefore a loss. And the condition of my desire, of its fulfillment, will be correlated with this loss.

We thus move from a matriarchal regime, a positive and simple world that we imagine to be happy—where every demand finds its natural satisfaction, which the breast, of course, imaginatively provides in an inexhaustible and undeniable way—to a regime that is traumatic in itself, since it consists in the introduction of the dimension of the real. Desire is now doomed to always manifest itself in vain. And objects, far from being pre-adapted objects prepared for me in the world, become, on the contrary, representative of the vanity of my desire.

J.-P. Lebrun: To account for what is real, that is, what we can no longer talk about because it is not part of the field of our representations, in other words, the field of what we call reality, you have sometimes referred, following Lacan, to the field of mathematics...

Ch. Melman: Indeed, mathematicians, and Cantor in particular, have wondered whether the sequence of numbers is infinite, whether I can always write "plus one" and continue indefinitely. This mathematician understood very well that, at the same time, there was an infinity that was forever unattainable and therefore outside the field of representation, outside the field of reality. But what was new about Cantor was that he named this out-of-scope entity, wrote it down, and called it "aleph," the infinite that can never be reached because it is always beyond numbering. However, it turned out that the invention of this notation was eminently operational in the field of mathematics. **W**e could say that Lacan did the same thing when he wrote

"the object a,"* that object "cause of desire" which is not part of our representations, but which he was nevertheless able to identify and write down. An object that is not part of our reality but which we have to situate in the Real.

j.-p. lebrun: This refers both to the progress of civilization that Freud spoke of when describing the transition from the recognition of the mother to the recognition of the father, and to what you have written elsewhere about the emergence of patriarchy, namely that "belief in patriarchy involves a topical shift that invites us to situate the referent no longer in reality, but in the real, that is, to make it disappear from the field of reality." Having often heard you discuss this subject, it seems that you do not share the generally accepted idea that patriarchy was established in Rome...

ch. melman: If it was with Rome that patriarchy was established, it was probably not the patriarchy we are familiar with, organized by the topical shift you just mentioned and the transition from evidence to belief. With the Romans, it was more a substitution of the mother in the realm of human reality.

There are a few arguments to support this, and they help us understand the radical transformation that Judeo-Christian religion brought about in replacing matriarchy with patriarchy. In Rome, a father did not derive his authority from any reference to a god; he derived his authority from himself. He was distinguished by a power that can be said to have had no limits other than respect for what his task required: to perpetuate the lineage to which he belonged.

It is clear that all this changed with our religion. The father in reality, the brave father of a family, is now nothing more than the representative, the delegate, the official of a Father who exists in reality. The father of reality, our father, will therefore have to celebrate a completely new cult within his family, since he will have to bear witness to the fact that it is through the renunciation of pleasure that the phallic insignia, the condition of the desiring subject, is delivered. Poor dad!

J.-P. Lebrun: So you're saying that what we saw among the Romans was more a substitution of the man for the mother, and that it was not until the success of Christianity that patriarchy truly emerged...

Ch. Melman: It wasn't in Rome that the patriarchy we are familiar with emerged, because the Roman father had all the power. Strangely enough, the Christian religion is temperate towards the father. The figure of the father in the Christian religion, let's be blunt, is that of Joseph. He is the cuckold, the one who leads the donkey and is forced to leave the story. The fertile relationship is established between the woman and the Holy Spirit; the father is to be endured, as a means to an end.

J.-P. Lebrun: But he is also the figure of God. It is in the Christian religion that God the Father appears...

CH. Melman: God the Father can very well be attributed a maternal figure. I can call God the Father, but endow him with maternal characteristics: universal love, kindness, benevolence, generosity, forgiveness, etc. So that in the Christian religion, it is much more the maternal figure that is spiritualized. Christianity tends to portray the father figure in the home as disruptive and violent in a nest that would have preferred to be maternal, that is, governed by love. Hence, we can—and must!—understand that every time we attack the father, we are attacking the one who comes to fornicate with the mother, who introduces sex into a closed world where, deep down, love should have reigned; the only tolerance being that of furtive sexuality.

J.-P. Lebrun: Could you comment further?

CH. Melman: If you consider, for example, this decisive instrument called mathematical logic, you can clearly see that everything that belongs to the realm of antecedents or causes necessarily belongs to the realm of the unwritable. What is new about the patriarchy that interests us, the one specific to the so-called Judeo-Christian religion—I am not talking about Roman patriarchy—is that it establishes the field of cause in what escapes logic, and therefore in the field of the uninscribable. Or, if it can be inscribed, the name of God becomes unpronounceable. Needless to say, this is clearly a radical change, a break with both matriarchy and with what was happening in the ancient world, populated by statues and representations, by various deities present on the roads, in the fields... The step that has been taken here is the introduction of an essential dimension, one that links the real to the impossible. This is an important breakthrough for human intelligence, establishing what language actually does, its demand for a loss of the object that could have been said naturally.

J.-P. Lebrun: But is this linked to the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, or only to the transition to the Judeo-Christian religion?

Ch. Melman: The transition from matriarchy to patriarchy is of the same order. The father is now taken as the cause. We no longer speak of an obvious or natural cause, as in the case of the mother and her child, but of a spiritual cause, so to speak, in the chain of generations. There was no need for a microscope or knowledge of the value of sperm to consider the father in this way. He occupies this position as a spiritual authority, in other words, he derives his authority from a source that is beyond any control, visual or otherwise, and this is what constituted progress. On the contrary, today we are returning in a way to matriarchy, as evidenced by single-parent families. This goes hand in hand with the rejection of the dimension of the impossible that was introduced by the paternal function and which we have already mentioned.

J.-P. Lebrun: You have often referred to castration, which is ultimately the establishment of this impossibility, to use a term you just used. But is it linked to religion or to structure, in other words, to language?

ch. melman: What we know is that the formal representative system of language always involves the establishment of a real—that is, what cannot be said—and an impossible. On the other hand, what we can reflect on is the question of whether this impossible linked to this characteristic of language will always be that of sex, in other words, whether the signified will always be sexual. As Lacan said, the sexual relationship * does not exist, is impossible, in other words, cannot be harmonious. Are changes or modifications in the writing of these processes likely to create a "flaw" that would not necessarily concern sex? And could this change be made without disrupting or hindering sexual functioning? Perhaps this

change could allow us to envisage a different kind of relationship with sex than the one we have, which is characterized by this impossibility, the "it's not that" aspect to which it always refers.

J.-P. Lebrun: Envisioning a different kind of relationship with sex? You raise a huge question there...

Ch. Melman: I'm not raising it, it's what you and I are talking about.

J.-P. Lebrun: It's a huge question because it could have radical consequences. For example, it could lead us to accept the idea that a child can be born to homosexual parents, whereas society has always been based and organized around gender differences. As I've already said, we don't know of any society that doesn't consider the recognition of gender differences to be the foundation of its organization. But if you separate castration from gender differences...

CH. Melman: But castration is by no means a guarantee of the proper functioning of society. And we need to agree on the term "homosexuality." There are forms of homosexuality that could be described as "organic," but there are also many forms of homosexuality that are clearly psychological. So we mustn't be too quick to generalize when addressing this issue.

J.-P. Lebrun: What do you mean by "organic" homosexualities?

CH. Melman: Those that force you to choose a partner who has the "organ." The others are happy with a partner whose virility is "psychological."

J.-P. Lebrun: Can society, the social fabric, accept children "born" to homosexual parents without destroying its foundations?

ch. melman: I believe above all that a different arrangement of the sexual system could render the various forms of homosexuality completely uninteresting and obsolete.

various forms of homosexuality—I am attached to the plural. Homosexualities can be analyzed as a defense against the cruelty of the establishment of sexuality. Let's imagine that this establishment of sexuality no longer has its traumatic side. It would not be unthinkable, then, to see homosexualities lose their appeal. I do not believe, of course, that we can conclude that everything would then become possible. Other complications would arise, of course. There is no advantage without disadvantage; what is gained on one side is lost on the other. Problems related to sexuality would not be resolved; there would be others.

The future of matriarchy

J.-P. Lebrun: By relegating patriarchy to limbo, we would therefore return to matriarchy. Is that really what you are arguing?

CH. Melman: We could have fun formalizing the situation in the following simple way. The prohibition of incest, which is therefore linked to paternal intervention, can be expressed as follows: I cannot write; a is married to b , for all values of a and b . If a is mother and b is child, a and b cannot be married. Or rather, a and b cannot be spouses for all values of a and b unless sex is foreclosed. This is a very simple little algorithm, but one with significant clinical implications. An obsessive neurotic, for example, will want to effectively foreclose sex so that a and b can be spouses. If we accept the elementary formalization that I propose, ab cannot be written for all values of a and b . This is what the incest taboo says. It can be written as: $a > b$ (inclusion relation) and yet $a \vee b$ (exclusive disjunction relation). It is true that a and b are distinguished by belonging to different generations. We can say that, in relation to the system to which the child belongs, the mother is in a meta-system, indexed by the sign which marks the power of the

generations. Lacan generalized by saying that incest defines the sexual relationship between successive generations.

Well, today we tend to write ab for all values of a and b , whatever they may be... A jouissance

— we come back to our starting point — is considered today as acceptable, worthy of being promoted, only on condition that it is of the order of excess, that is, producing a subjective eclipse. Whether through alcohol, speed, drugs, scopic excess, auditory excess... That's how it manifests itself today.

J.-P. Lebrun: And what about patriarchy in all this?

Ch. Melman: Patriarchy, insofar as it contains the promise, inscribed for example in this ab , that conjunction is possible regardless of the values of a and b , represents, if I may say so, the great ideal, even at the cost of foreclosing sex. This implies at the same time that we are trying to promote a kind of perfect understanding, collusion, adherence, and capture, and that between the two partners there is nothing left to say: speech can die out. A nod will suffice!

J.-P. Lebrun: When we talk about patriarchy, we generally refer to sociological and anthropological data...

ch. melman: Certainly, as I have already suggested, patriarchy is that domain, that world that offers us comfort, gentleness, hope, warmth, the familiar, the benevolence of this positivity, that is to say, of this regime where the signifier $*$, in language, refers to nothing other than an ideal object that is substantivized and therefore offered up to be taken, seized, captured, possessed, and thus, of course, consumed. But above all, patriarchy means something even simpler: the child has nothing to ask of anyone other than its mother; it has everything to expect from her.

J.-P. Lebrun: Could this reemergence, so to speak, of matriarchy today be conducive to the development of homosexuality?

Ch. Melman: I don't know how to answer that. Not necessarily, I think. There isn't necessarily a direct link between the two phenomena. Perhaps we would move more towards forms of bisexuality...

J.-P. Lebrun: Does the advent of this world of collusion, adherence, and capture force us to change the way we talk about the Symbolic*?

CH. Melman: Certainly. Because the traumatic replaces the Symbolic. The defect that generates desire introduced by the Symbolic is now replaced by the damage caused by trauma.

J.-P. Lebrun: But the defect introduced by the Symbolic stems from the fact that we are beings of language; this is a feature of the human condition, and it is not a trauma...

ch. melman: Yes. But since the Symbolic introduces a flaw, desire itself can easily be interpreted as trauma. From there, it's a short step to assuming that the stranger has come to replace the father...

J.-P. Lebrun: In this new psychic economy that we are discussing, the symbolic would no longer have its place as a third party. Not only is everything experienced as a trauma, but even more so as a trauma without a solution, except to declare oneself a victim. Is that what you are suggesting?

Ch. Melman: It is a trauma that has no solution, if any, other than orthopedic or surgical, and which therefore leads to demands for compensation. This is what we were saying earlier, particularly when we mentioned the Perruche ruling.

J.-P. Lebrun: And so once again we find ourselves in a logic that leads to not wanting to pay the price of being subject to

laws of language, to not wanting to acknowledge our debt to the Other *. Is that right?

Ch. Melman: Exactly!

J.-p. lebrun: On the other hand, we can now believe that we are the initiators of our own organization, with no place given to language or to what constitutes us as human beings. Is that what is happening?

CH. Melman: Absolutely.

The laws of language

J.-p. lebrun: But could you define these laws of speech and language that we have already referred to several times, and clarify their role?

ch. melman: The laws of language are fairly simple. Language is a system of elements—signifiers*—which, by referring to each other, have no meaning in themselves. The desire of the human animal, which necessarily passes through language, is therefore organized around what is, from that point on, a loss, since this system is not "closed," never "complete," never finished. No object will therefore be capable of perfectly fulfilling and satisfying human desire, just as no word can be the perfect equivalent of a "thing." To speak of the laws of language is therefore, obviously, to refer first to the law of the Symbolic, since each element of language is a symbol of this pure loss. But to this dimension of the Symbolic, we must add, as Lacan invites us to do, the dimensions of the Real * and the Imaginary *: the Real conceptualizes the fact that there is a space that resists formalization, an impossible to say; the Imaginary refers to our ability to give form to what responds to loss, to this pure lack.

J.-P. Lebrun: Not everything can be put into words; that is the realm of the Real. To account for the origin, we

invent myths, which is the realm of the Imaginary. But what about the Symbolic? You often refer to the "symbolic pact." Why is that?

CH. Melman: The "symbolic pact" is no secret. It refers to this: every relationship, whether with a partner or with an object, is bound by the mutual participation of both parties in this fundamental loss that defines human desire. This loss will henceforth unite and divide, bring together and at the same time separate the two protagonists, whether they are the two partners in a couple or a partner and an object.

J.-P. Lebrun: And what about the laws of speech? How are they specific?

Ch. Melman: The laws of speech... Well, to answer that would take us into much broader territory, involving many questions that may not be directly related to the new psychic economy that interests us here.

J.-P. Lebrun: But perhaps you can still tell us why you make the distinction between the laws of language and the laws of speech?

CH. Melman: Why do I make this distinction? Because the laws of speech inevitably establish a type of duality organized by the inequality and otherness of the partners, an irreducible asymmetry of places. No one has failed to experience this effect of speech to which I am drawing attention: speech, insofar as it is addressed to a speaker, inevitably establishes an asymmetry. Through the simple use of speech, you will not be able to achieve the ideal that haunts us, which is that of fraternity, equality, and transitivity. On the contrary, the mere act of addressing someone else creates and establishes—by the very fact of speaking—an asymmetry between the two interlocutors, which places one in a position of authority and the other in a position of seeking recognition. The use of speech introduces into social life

a division that creates, whether we like it or not, two different places, heterogeneous in relation to each other. And these places refer, at least indirectly, to gender differences. This, then, is the type of law that, as we know, cannot exist today without provoking some kind of reaction!

J.-P. Lebrun: So it is still related to our subject!

CH. Melman: Indeed. But these laws represent above all one of the pillars of the psychic organization itself, rather than playing a specific role in the new psychic economy.

J.-P. Lebrun: Except that the new psychic economy treats the laws of speech in a certain way...

CH. Melman: It treats them by seeking to substitute images for words.

J.-P. Lebrun: And, by the same token, to erase this heterogeneity of places, to cancel out their asymmetry, to erase everything that differentiates each place...

Ch. Melman: In this respect, we have moved into an iconic world. We are now moving towards a digital world on the one hand and an iconic world on the other, which will gradually replace our literate world.

Symbolic and symptomatic

J.-P. Lebrun: Yet it is words that are at stake in the symptom, isn't it?

CH. Melman: The originality of Freud's discovery in relation to what psychiatry, until then, in Kraepelin [14](#) for example, had been able to establish and construct, was indeed to show that the symptom of the neurotic — which Freud had identified in hysterics, for example by looking at the origin of their paralysis — is nothing other than the organization, the somatic expression of a linguistic sequence. In other words, the symptom — the

paralyzed arm of the hysterical patient is not the anatomical arm, it is the arm as it is spoken - is constructed by speech, it is a kind of sentence, a verbal ejaculation, it is what "cuts off our arms ," and—this was Freud's initial hope—it would suffice to decipher this cryptogram for the symptom to disappear. This reversal is essential in relation to what was once thought—where a somatic or pithiatric cause was attributed to hysteria, and which we have not yet completely overcome. This is because the symptom is constructed by a sequence of language, and it is through the power of speech that it can be dispelled. Hence the "talking cure," which is, to put it simply, the analytical cure.

J.-P. Lebrun: Lacan, for his part, argued that the Symbolic is not to be confused with the symptom. This distinction seems useful to me in questioning the new psychic economy. In the latter—and I am thinking of the patient you mentioned earlier—is what is wrong still a symptom? Are we still in the Symbolic?

Ch. Melman: The Symbolic is not to be confused with the symptom, because the symptom is a defense against the Symbolic. There can be no confusion. This is the whole meaning of Lacan's seminar on the *sinthome*. The symbol, as Lacan reminded us, is that half of a coin that one interlocutor offers to the other in the expectation that the other will add the other half, so that the two together form a single coin, a complete coin. But, as we know, due to the effects of language, neither of them ever has the right half, and that is the problem. They never have the right half, which means that between the two halves there will always be a deficit. What, then, are neuroses if not a way of defending oneself in a radical, obstinate, relentless manner against this absence, this deficit, this structural flaw that is established by speech, by the pact proposed by speech?

J.-P. Lebrun: At the same time, the symptom, if it constitutes a defense against the Symbolic, always expresses itself, so to speak, in the language of the Symbolic. Whereas the patient you mentioned earlier presented herself as not referring to any impossibility, as emancipated from the Symbolic...

ch. melman: I'm not as sure as you are. Because these individuals who appear to be the "bearers" of the new psychic economy, you inevitably see them organizing something impossible as well. Not always the same thing, it can vary, but even with them, there is and always will be something impossible. Take sexual freedom, for example. What we can see in our practice is that it will ultimately result in partners seeking to create discomfort for themselves. They will systematically seek to establish what is wrong, what causes conflict, or what causes difficulty. Because, deep down, what they want is to legitimize this freedom. On this side, there is a traditional attempt to arrange "realities," impossibilities, but now through somewhat erratic, flexible, and mobile processes.

J.-P. Lebrun: But when you mentioned your patient, this young woman who lives without desire, and even almost without needs, and who, moreover, asks for nothing, we get the impression that she is led to offer a lack of symptoms, what I would call an "asymptoma." Just a certain way of behaving, a behavior that can be observed but which escapes the law of the Symbolic. That's what I wanted to introduce...

CH. Melman: Your "asymptoma" is a great find! There is still something impossible for her. For example, quite simply, to access common sense, to get up in the morning, to find a job, to feed herself, to clothe herself, to have relationships... Even if it is not formulated, recorded in the field of demands, of requests, it is still present. There is a "she can't"!

And all her mother's requests for her to overcome this "she can't" are obviously ineffective. However, and here you are right, it is probably not an impossibility that has been subjectivized through a request. It is not necessarily an impossibility that shapes what would be a complaint. This young woman does not complain about anything. She does not ask for anything. So much so, in fact, that she does not eat or drink, or hardly at all, as we have said.

Social psychosis and subjective channel surfing

J.-P. Lebrun: What are the consequences of the emergence of such cases, of such a clinic, for collective life?

CH. Melman: We are sliding, it must be said, into social psychosis.

J.-P. Lebrun: Why, all of a sudden, when we've been talking about perversion up until now, are we talking about psychosis?

ch. melman: The problem of the relationship between perversions and psychoses has always been a major topic of discussion. Today, it's almost caricatural. When you see young people walking down the street with their headphones on, supposedly listening to music, you really feel like you're witnessing some kind of mechanical attempt to produce a permanent hallucinatory noise. It's as if, unable to bear the silence of the Other, we have to enter a world where there are constant voices, and voices that are not without consequences, since they overwhelm you. You can clearly see from their facial expressions, or even the rhythm they mark, that these people are indeed under influence. They are caught up in a kind of perfectly autistic masturbatory pleasure aroused by this artificially created hallucinatory system. The relationship with others is inevitably diminished and disinvested in relation to the relationship with this vocal system.

Another manifestation of this phenomenon is that it is now normal to read articles in various publications that are clearly inconsistent, I mean texts that are not organized by any "place," held together by no ballast that gives coherence to the arguments or elements. You have a first proposal

that are clearly inconsistent, by which I mean texts that are not organized by any "place," held together by no ballast that gives coherence to the arguments or elements. You have a first proposition, then a second, a third, a fourth... without being able to identify what the common reference point is for these sentences in relation to what they are trying to address or what prompted them. These proposals follow one another, and you are left with the rather silly feeling that anything can actually be said. Of course, this was sometimes the case before, but what was written still had to appear to make sense, otherwise it was a problem. Today, this is no longer necessary. When you read your newspaper, you may be surprised to find that its content is completely incoherent, like certain delusions before they take on a paranoid dimension. There is a "diffluence." Isn't the television news "diffluent"? The position taken by the subject—in this case, the journalist and, following him, the listener — in relation to the various pieces of information presented is never the same. There is no consistency, no stability.

J.-P. Lebrun: Yes, as if, from now on, we could escape subjectivity...

ch. melman: We can't escape it. The subject does what I was talking about earlier: his belonging to a community is entirely momentary; it will change depending on where he is speaking, as they say, depending on the information. We no longer have any accepted ideals. Channel surfing isn't just about images, it's also subjective. You're not always dealing with the same subject. You are dealing with a face that is as neutral and insignificant as possible, but which is the mask of a shifting subjectivity. You never know what the person talking to you is really thinking, as if they themselves never think anything that is fixed. We are fortunate to be free of ideologies, but what have we replaced them with? Since the subject is nevertheless compelled to refer to an Other system,

what takes its place today is information. This is where power lies. Depending on the information you give, you can completely and perfectly manipulate the recipients, making them think, feel, and decide as you wish. That is why there are no longer any politicians today who dare to do without a communications advisor, the person who will make the signifier * master. It is no longer the economist, the strategist, the wise man, or the priest who holds the top position, but the communications expert. Are we not in the midst of a psychotic system? This is what guarantees the effectiveness of this mental manipulation: the subject no longer has any perspective on the discourse being presented to them; they are caught, ensnared, enveloped.

J.-P. Lebrun: Except that he actively participates in this system...

Ch. Melman: This subject is not psychotic, but he does participate in it, attracted by the prospect, the promise held out by this new economy: it is now possible to have multiple lives. Until recently, we were condemned to lead one and only one existence. Let's be precise: we were condemned to a certain type of enjoyment, with stories that were always the same and in the company of characters who were in fact always the same, stories that repeated themselves even when the partners changed. What we are offered today is the opportunity to experience different kinds of enjoyment, to explore all kinds of situations. That is true liberalism, psychological liberalism! The market offers us, as if it were a matter of course, the opportunity to participate in multiple existences. This is reflected in everyday life in the paths taken by young people who do indeed lead multiple existences, both in the professional sphere and in their subjective experiences—including those related to sexual identity. Are you going to be condemned to be heterosexual all your life, to take a particular side or love a particular type of woman? Today, we can envisage that differently, adopt successively all the

positions that are offered, sometimes obviously with effects of derealization. It is not polygamy, it is poly-subjectivity.

J.-P. Lebrun: It would be a real break with yesterday's way of life!

CH. Melman: In the past, if I may put it that way, that is to say, the day before yesterday, a life was organized by its beginning, and that beginning already included, in a way, its end: we knew where we were born and we knew where we were going to die, and what happened in between was relatively predictable. Today, however, it seems that we have the possibility of living several different lives in succession. These lives are different because of social conditions, professional or marital circumstances, but also because the subject is no longer the same. We are not the same from one date to another, as if we had the possibility of following several completely different paths from a subjective point of view. And when this is not simultaneous, it will be successive.

It is clear that all this brings new issues to light, leading, I would say, to a new man occupying the field of reality, whom I would readily call "the liberal man," whose question will be whether or not he will be weighed down by an unconscious, which does not seem at all necessary. Let me remind you that the Freudian unconscious, if we are to believe Lacan's teaching on the subject, appeared at a very specific moment in cultural evolution. There may well be other unconscious minds besides the Freudian unconscious. The Freudian unconscious is the unconscious that speaks, that makes itself heard, that meddles in my affairs, that comes to disturb me. The subject is inhabited by an unknown entity that disturbs the order of his world and says: "That's not it, that's not the satisfaction I want. " There is a desire that drives me and that I am unaware of, yet it is structured; it is not just any desire, nor is it a fantasy. Such is the Freudian unconscious.

In any case, today, in our clinic, there is a "liberal man," a new subject, "without serious problems," whose suffering is, of course, different. We are seeing new clinical expressions of suffering because, despite the happiness that the new psychic economy is supposed to bring us, suffering reminds us that there is always something impossible, that there is always something wrong somewhere. I will give you the example of two young men I am seeing, both in their forties, both from educated backgrounds, who have the same problem—they come to see me separately—they cannot stay in one place. One of them is very charming, but he can't stay in one place with his wife and kids; he has to constantly leave, go away. It's not that he doesn't love his wife, even if he doesn't feel much desire for her anymore, and he's very fond of his children. So he's always somewhere else, and then he comes back as if pulled by a rubber band, but it's mainly for the kids, and he's sorry about what's happening, he's confused, he's unhappy, and he doesn't understand what's happening to him. And it's obvious that with the other women he meets, he doesn't realize anything that would allow him to hold a place in their lives. For the other young man, what's happening is similar. He's in a relationship with a woman who has all the qualities he wants, who loves him, and who has a son who isn't his but to whom he's very attached. There is a bond between them, a connection, and yet he can't stay put. He is always thousands of miles away, even though his travels obviously cause a certain amount of disruption, and without him getting anything out of it.

We see that this is an effect of this new psychic economy, which no longer preserves the place where a subject can stand, the place where a subject can find his *heim*, his "home,"

to know that this is where they belong. I must say that these are clinical cases that I had not encountered before: I had never seen clinical forms of this type. We should give them a name, perhaps call them constitutional atopia, or at least find a way to express what they are confronting us with. And we should acknowledge the desolation they reveal, this feeling of not being legitimized anywhere.

J.-P. Lebrun: This brings us back to what you were saying about flexible subjects...

CH. Melman: In any case, we can see how close we are to psychosis!

J.-P. Lebrun: Is it that obvious? I repeat: you talk about perversion and at the same time you say that we are in psychosis...

CH. Melman: Perversion, in this case, is the only anchor against psychosis. It now constitutes the fixed point, the only possible reference point, the last compass.

J.-P. Lebrun: No doubt, but it's as if you were playing with Russian dolls: perversion suddenly reveals itself to be the possible defense against this kind of social psychosis...

CH. Melman: Indeed, a defense against total derealization, which, as we know, threatens us with this new regime of subjectivity that we see at work. Take, for example, the migratory phenomena we observe on our roads during what we call vacations. It's astonishing. To be sure that it's vacation, you have to do what everyone else does: suffer, sit in traffic jams, endure pain. The situation I'm describing is undoubtedly parodic, but everyone can already observe it. When you hear the radio announce a "black Sunday" on the roads, it's saying that your behavior is perfectly predictable and planned. Even before you act, they know what you're going to do. Big Brother is there, in his

benevolent voice, saying: be careful, on Sunday, you'll all be on the roads. You live without surprises, you're not going to come home three days early or a day late. That's it, that's the new economy. We can't stay still, but we all have to do it at the same time.

J.-P. Lebrun: Couldn't we mention, with regard to "staying in place," those hyperactive children that pediatricians call hyperkinetic? Doesn't this symptom also refer to the new psychic economy?

ch. melman: Indeed. I am thinking, for example, of a three-year-old child who cannot sit still and who is given—as many others are today—Ritalin, a product designed to keep him quiet. So why can't this little boy sit still? He was brought to me by his mother. This young woman could be quite pretty, quite pleasant, but she presents herself as deliberately unkempt, without much concern for her appearance. I immediately learn that she is a lecturer at a provincial university and, talking to her a little more, I hear that she is clearly very invested in her work, her friendships, and her social relationships. The boy's father left when he was nine months old. The child sees him occasionally, but since he left, there has been a succession of men in the house. Today, there is one who seems stable and has the same first name as the father. When we talk a little with the mother, it becomes very clear that her child has no place in her psychological makeup. He is there, of course, but in fact, he does not count. She has organized her life in such a way that no aspect of her motherhood can disrupt the arrangements that suit her, those that correspond to the desires of a young, active, intelligent, socially interesting woman... One might say that, in her case, motherhood has not been able to "take root" symbolically. In reality, she has this kid, but that's it.

She does what she has to do, though. The school principal told her that it wasn't working anymore, that he was getting into trouble and constantly bothering the other children, so she brought him to me. But, as her relationship with him shows when he's at my house, she behaves toward him like a nanny, a good nanny. I think the child senses that he doesn't belong there, and that he doesn't belong with his father either, even though his father sees him, welcomes him, etc. You could say that this child has no vocation, no calling. He is there, but he has not been called to be there. He is very intelligent, very friendly, but very quickly, as I was able to see, he cannot sit still. I spoke with his mother, in front of him, about the men she had been brought to see. During that time, he was in a remarkable state: it was no longer restlessness, but frenzy. When we finished the interview, he went down the stairs leading to the exit and, when he saw people waiting, he said out loud, as he was going down the stairs, loud enough for everyone to hear: "Goodbye, mean psychiatrist!" " He's three years old, remember! Then he felt remorseful, so he came back into my office and said, without actually doing it, "I'll give you a kiss." And he left.

Clearly, this child is forced, if I may say so, to repress what he experiences as the immodesty of his mother's private life. And he obviously felt that my way of bringing this story out into the open was violent. It is a form of repression, but one that ne lui procure pas d'abri subjectif. Une scène primitive "classic," if he had witnessed his father and mother having sex, would also be repressed but could provide shelter for his subjectivity. In this case, what happens, and what he experiences as something to be repressed, does not give him any identity. He was nine months old when his father left. However, the men his mother brings home, who change and are never "the same," are there in a position other than that of a father. They do not allow him to maintain an

identification. Even if the original repression is in place, there remains an unresolved problem: that of knowing what will order the secondary repressions. Will the secondary repressions be homogeneous, if I may say so, with the original repression? If what needs to be repressed is scandalous, unacceptable in relation to the original repression, you can imagine the kind of confusion this child is doomed to. So where can he stand? Nowhere!

J.-P. Lebrun: There remains, however, a major difficulty. You tell us again: in fact, as an analyst, there is nothing to be done. Yet many of those who come to see analysts may very well participate in this economy. So the question arises anyway: what is to be done?

ch. melman: An analyst can only "do" if they are addressed in the register of transference*. That is, if they manage to get their patient to make a consistent request that is ultimately addressed to the analyst. If he does not succeed, he can do nothing. The young girl I saw and mentioned does not ask for anything. She came to see me with sympathy and said she would come back, but I can predict that this is unlikely. One small clue leads me to believe that she may have invented a Jewish ancestor: she wore a Star of David around her neck, as if she wanted to cling to a family tree, to a lineage. But it was a tenuous thread, a tiny Star of David at the end of a tiny chain, which seems more fantastical than real. So there's little chance I'll see her again...

Psychiatry in the face of the new psychic economy

J.-P. Lebrun: I can agree that the analyst is powerless in certain situations. But what about the psychiatrist? What can he do in the face of such a psychic organization?

Ch. Melman: You know as well as I do what the psychiatrist does! He distributes *pharmakon*, molecules that are also poisons. We should rather ask ourselves whether psychiatry, whose privileges are different, has the knowledge it needs to weigh in on the debate. It is clear that, if it fails to do so, it risks finding itself at the service of dehumanization, in the chemical gadget aisle. Then, a simple salesperson, in its place, will suffice. We are heading in that direction.

J.-P. Lebrun: You leave the psychiatrist little leeway?

CH. Melman: But what is he doing? That's what interests me. His behavior doesn't depend on how much freedom I give him or not. I saw a 60-year-old woman very recently. At the age of 53, she lost her parents, who died within eight days of each other—they were a couple who loved each other. I saw a woman arrive who was completely frozen by neuroleptics, clearly in a state of mental sluggishness and clumsiness. She came to me and said, "I can't get out of this." Get out of what? What had happened to her, other than being in a state of mourning? With neuroleptics, she was simply not allowed to grieve. So when you ask me, "What about the psychiatrist?" what can I say? Psychiatrists increasingly tend to treat grief as an illness, confusing grief with depression. Many no longer know that grief is normal!

J.-P. Lebrun: You can see it right away, if you notice the vocabulary they use so often: "You're depressed..."

Ch. Melman: It's incredible! But in a way, they're right, because social obligations, work, family responsibilities, all of that mean that you're no longer allowed to grieve. You have to be on the go all the time.

J.-P. Lebrun: In your opinion, can psychiatry only follow the trend and therefore participate in the establishment of this new psychic economy?

Ch. Melman: Doctors, and psychiatrists in particular, have unfortunately become servants of power. We were astonished by what happened in the Soviet Union, where doctors sent opponents—those known as dissidents—to camps and psychiatric hospitals. But here, doctors, rather than serving the sick, are now serving social imperatives. Which, to return to our example, dictate that patients have no time, no right, and no opportunity to grieve: they must be at their workstations. And if they are not there, it is because they are sick, so we give them drugs. Drugs that prevent them from grieving, that mummify them. A whole series of cases, such as the contaminated blood scandal, have clearly shown the price to be paid when doctors, or rather medicine, are placed at the service of social functioning rather than patients. This is what those in power, whatever their political persuasion, now want from doctors.

J.-P. Lebrun: To get patients back to functioning properly, at work and elsewhere?

Ch. Melman: There is no need for this order to be explicit. It is the patient himself who spontaneously formulates such a request, inspired by a whole system that puts pressure on him. The mother comes to see the psychiatrist and says: "But I have to take care of my children. I have to take care of my husband, otherwise he'll leave me! And I have my mother who is ill..." And we respond to her request.

J.-P. Lebrun: In such a situation, isn't the collective task of psychoanalysts first and foremost to bring to light and clearly identify this new psychic economy at work? But then, of course, they might be tempted to become defenders or

apologists for a different type of social functioning. And, in this regard, you often point out that analysts should not be guardians of the Symbolic, or of castration *...

ch. melman: No. Nor of the father or religion.

J.-P. Lebrun: But then? Should psychoanalysts really resign themselves to doing nothing?

CH. Melman: We are not doing nothing, since we are organizing numerous symposiums, conferences, and presentations, including public ones, on these issues. We are even taking a stand in the legal arena: we intervened in the Perruche case. And we have also intervened on issues of genetics, the family, problems of filiation, paternity, etc. So you can't say that we're doing nothing. But the fact is that what we say is not accepted. Or else it is diverted from its purpose, that is, it is put at the service of dominant intentions, dominant discourses.

J.-P. Lebrun: But how can you say that "we are not the guardians of the symbolic, etc." and at the same time undertake all this work—particularly here

—to try to make people hear what is happening and the risks that this entails? Isn't that contradictory?

Ch. Melman: We are not the guardians of the Symbolic, nor are we, as psychoanalysts, the guardians of the perpetuation of paternal authority. We have no reason to be nostalgic for a patriarchal order that we see gradually collapsing. But in our practice, I believe it is good for analysts to have a sense of what the analysand, the young person who now comes knocking, is waiting for, is demanding. What they want, of course, is to confront, through the cure, this type of order that allows access to a jouissance* that today continually eludes their grasp, a tenable jouissance. But that does not mean, let us repeat, that we have to become apostles of castration. Moreover, outside the consulting room, we can simply

let people know what psychoanalysts, or rather psychoanalysts, let's be modest, are able to think and say about this. And for the rest, it's like an interpretation: you can't force anyone to take it into account.

J.-P. Lebrun: Of course! But in the end, you are not freeing the analyst from his responsibility to identify this new psychic economy and its consequences. He cannot shirk his responsibility...

ch. melman: He is absolutely not absolved, to use your term, of his responsibility. On the contrary, he must be committed, while having no illusions about the limits of his actions. I recently took part in a radio program on the issue of adoption by same-sex couples. The context was striking: everything was done to make me appear reactionary, backward, or violent. It was extremely difficult, in the face of the journalists' questions, to make any other point heard. The die was cast; you were only there to serve as a token and an entertainer!

Since it was a mass, the most interesting thing was to wonder where it was being said and by whom. There were very diverse people there, each supposed to cultivate their own thoughts, and yet they were gathered together, united in a kind of community by a kind of magical magnetism. But how does such a community come into being? The only time there was a sudden hiccup in the ceremony was when I asked a journalist, "If something happened to you, would you agree to your children being entrusted to a homosexual couple?" She replied directly to me, "Yes, of course!" But on the way out, she was furious: "You intimidated me!" I was surprised: "What do you mean, I intimidated you? We were talking about children who could just as easily be our own. So, if ours... I don't see how..." She was very upset, and I know I'll never be invited back. This happened during

prime time, on one of the most popular stations, between 7 and 8 p.m., when people are in their kitchens or in their cars. The listeners whose calls they took—the show was supposed to be interactive—were all against me. I'm sure, though, that among those who called in, there must have been some who had a different opinion...

J.-P. Lebrun: Here you are taking the example of a radio station that submits to this famous so-called law of the market...

CH. Melman: Wait! A month earlier, I had been invited to appear on a television channel renowned for its quality and known for its debates on major social issues. It was worse! I found myself with a journalist who spent the whole time trying to trap me. I won't be invited back either. As my answers never matched what he was convinced I was going to say and what he had planned, the debate host was completely thrown off balance. There is now a kind of community of thought, which is not articulated anywhere, which does not refer to anything tangible, but which imposes itself on everyone who participates in such debates. If you don't adhere to it, if you're not in tune with it, you're rejected. You can see that liberalism has its limits and its intolerances.

What can the law do?

J.-P. Lebrun: In this context, how do you interpret the increasing recourse to the courts and the growing appeal of social issues to the law?

CH. Melman: The social sphere's appeal to the law is becoming increasingly important, and you are right to point this out. Given the foreclosure of the ternary, relationships today can only be dual. And, inevitably, this duality will contractualize conflicts, that is, lead to them being regularly experienced as a breach, attributable to one or the other, of a tacit contract. Faced with the search for this missing third party, we are moving

towards the field of justice, which is recognized for treating every subject of law as equal and identical. Faced with problems related to this radical otherness that I have already mentioned, which is the foundation of genuine relationships between subjects, we will respond by applying the law in the realm of similarity and identity. And we will systematically place reason on the side of the weakest. This is a substitution of the missing symbolic third party with a very real third party. But this third party no longer has anything to do with the symbolic third party, with the authority we were dealing with before—even and especially when we claim to be restoring that authority. The function of all this? It is to ensure that there is no difference between the sexes. That partners can claim the same rights. Of course, it was possible to resort to justice when the symbolic third party was still in place, but in a different way. A man's right is not necessarily the same as a woman's. Who can claim that they have the same rights? They do not have the same duties either. But today, the law offers a legal response to all the main causes of conflict raised by otherness and inequality.

J.-P. Lebrun: Would you go so far as to say that the law itself could be contaminated by this new economy?

CH. Melman: But it is! It is because current law stipulates that all claims are legitimate and must be satisfied, otherwise there is injustice and fraud. If someone remains unsatisfied, this is no longer acceptable; it must be remedied, and justice will see to it. So, it seems to me that the law is evolving towards what would now be, in the same way as so-called comfort medicine, a "comfort" right. In other words, if medicine is now about repairing damage, such as that caused by age or gender, then the law must be able to correct all the dissatisfactions that may arise in our social environment. Those who are likely to experience dissatisfaction

is automatically identified as a victim, since they will suffer socially from what has become a prejudice that the law should—or should already have been—able to remedy.

J.-P. Lebrun: Whereas previously the law organized its interventions on the basis of a fiction, an ideal of justice, you introduce the idea of a law that itself submits to this new economy and merely takes note of how it works. Have I understood you correctly?

CH. Melman: Indeed. This is what jurists call the need for the law to conform to changing customs.

IV.

The imprint of nostalgia

J.-P. Lebrun: You describe the emergence of this new psychic economy and its avatars by showing us how it is taking shape without any organizing ideology, how it is organizing itself without the subjects even being aware of it...

CH. Melman: Completely unbeknownst to them, indeed. We are in the process of abandoning a culture, linked to religion, which forces subjects to repress their desires and become neurotic, and moving towards another where the right to freely express all desires and to satisfy them fully is displayed. Such a radical change leads to a rapid devaluation of the values transmitted by

moral and political tradition. The petrified figures of authority and knowledge seem to have disintegrated to such an extent that one might think that the change we are experiencing is being driven by the spontaneous convergence of individual wills, without reference to any established program.

J.-P. Lebrun: And that is certainly one of the key points you raise. Furthermore, you say that this is the consequence of progress, which consists in having realized that the sky is empty. And you have pointed out the confusion between, on the one hand, observing that the sky is empty, that the Other * is uninhabited, and, on the other hand, believing that there is no Other. For me, this is a major confusion, which has a whole series of consequences. Yet you talk about it as if moving from the old regime, from a traditional psychic economy where the phallic order reigns more or less supreme, where patriarchy organizes the whole of society, to a new psychic economy, were simply a matter of falling from Charybdis into Scylla. Your comments give the impression that you see no evolution, no movement that could be promising or useful. Is this a deliberate choice? Basically, to put it in a somewhat caricatural way, you seem to be saying that there is either the old system, the only one that can function in a more or less satisfactory way to preserve the subject, or the new one, but with the avatars we have discussed. Are we condemned either to a return to the past—which is unlikely, even if we wanted it—or to the disturbing picture you describe?

ch. melman: I regret that my comments may have given you the impression that I feel any nostalgia for the old regime, a kind of regret for the good old neurosis of dad, the neurosis centered around the love of the father. I have no desire to return to that era in order to escape the current malaise of civilization, as described by Freud. But, and this is the problem, the way in which we are dealing with today's malaise is leading us to fulfill the neurotic's fantasy, that is, to imagine that perversion is the cure

of neurosis. However, we know that perversion, despite its seductive appeal, is not, from a psychoanalytic point of view, a more tenable solution than any other.

What is the psychoanalytic point of view? Let us recall it. The regulation of our relationship with the world and with ourselves, we say, is not subject to arbitrariness, caprice, contract, or simple goodwill. In other words, we do not have the ability to do whatever we want. There is a Law, and this Law is determined by language. This Law is not fixed forever in its form or mode of application. It may, for example, have been supported for a long time by religion. However, this did not prevent Freud from denouncing this form of support for the law as a neurosis: religion as a neurosis of humanity.

Today, the question arises as to whether our current stage of cultural development finally allows us—despite all the resistance to it—to accept and acknowledge the determinism that governs us. The only way to be human is to take into account this determinism imposed on us by the laws of language. This is not to celebrate or worship it, or to embark on a path of skepticism or resignation. Rather, it is so that, once we have recognized these laws, we will be better able to examine collectively what we can do with them. And, in particular, to examine whether we can better resolve the issue of sexual discomfort in which humanity lives.

All I am suggesting—without proposing anything, because psychoanalysts should not come to the forefront (or the background) of the stage with a program!—is that humanism, if there is such a thing, would have to recognize these laws that govern us. And, from there, we should consider that this is not some kind of fatal order of things, before which we must masochistically bow down, but a state of affairs that we must study, as Lacan never ceased to do, in order to

identify how these laws lend themselves to other interpretations, which may lead to a better resolution of our symptoms and our relationship with ourselves, the world, our fellow human beings, social life, and therefore "well-being."

Perhaps this new humanism will emerge one day. It will no longer need the divine hypothesis to sustain it and will then be able to free itself from neurosis, guilt, and forgiveness, as well as from the false audacity of perversion. Morality will no longer be written, taught, or imposed, but will be the responsibility of the individual, in their relationship with the dimension of loss which, although now disconnected from the sacred, remains essential for the proper establishment of desire.

J.-P. Lebrun: Isn't what you're proposing a form of utopia?

CH. Melman: It is indeed utopian. Because, in reality, "well-being" has always been an ambiguous notion, without any physical measure of its own, a notion that lends itself only to subjective evaluations. It is clear that, in the current state of affairs, man does not seek "well-being." Lacan said that "what man aspires to is hell!" So let's not be surprised by what is happening! In reality, there is no force, cultural, social or psychological, that invites us to escape our malaise. And that is why you hear me saying all this with a certain pessimism. But without resignation.

J.-P. Lebrun: Why do you recall Lacan's strong statement that "what man aspires to is hell!"? How do you understand that?

CH. Melman: But because man wants to fulfill his fantasy *, and the realization of this fantasy is hell. We have no choice but to choose between the semblance * of reality and the reality of hell.

Is there a third way?

J.-P. Lebrun: I remember one of your speeches [15](#) where you said, following Lacan, that "taking the Real * as a means"—in other words, if I understand correctly, taking the Real to tie together the Imaginary * and the Symbolic * [16](#) — could prevent us from falling under the sway of an excess of the Symbolic — as when patriarchy triumphed! — as well as under the yoke of an excess of the Imaginary — which is rather what we find ourselves in now. However, I heard you say very clearly that there was a third way forward. What might that be?

ch. melman: The problem with third ways is that they require us to measure the forces that support them. There have to be some forces that are interested in them, that want to explore them. Otherwise, they are just dreamers' paths. We can see today that these forces do not exist.

J.-P. Lebrun: Certainly, but what would they look like if they did exist?

CH. Melman: The will to renounce the symptom.

J.-P. Lebrun: When you say, for example, that without transference * there is little possibility of action, I still feel that while this may be true for an analyst conducting a therapy session in his office, it is a statement that disregards everything that could be called the psycho-medical-social! When we are dealing with people who are really stuck in this new psychic economy, their "Prescribing" a way out is virtually useless, if not impossible, but...

CH. Melman: In any case, such a prescription would undoubtedly be ineffective. Anything that claims today to oppose the imperative of complete satisfaction—which, as we have seen, can only be achieved through the exhaustion of the orifices or the eclipse of the subject, stupefied and annihilated by noise, images, drugs, whatever you want—and anything that claims to want to introduce some temperance into it, noting

, as we have just done, that the individual aspires to hell, would immediately be labeled conservative and retrograde. To the point that traditionally reactionary political forces themselves refuse to support such positions, because they know they would be immediately disqualified.

The other day, I was listening to a right-wing leader—which is not so common—advocating the free use of hashish. What was this about? It was, of course, about reaching out to young people, about showing oneself to be modern. Because no other voice can be heard, except at the risk of being immediately labeled conservative. And since we psychoanalysts do not consider ourselves to be the hygienists of the society of the future, we can only observe the effects of the changes underway. On the whole, moreover, people—despite all their complaints—seem rather happy. Why? Because there has been an equalization—equal-i-za-tion—of pleasures, now accessible to all... more or less. A retiree, for example, can take those wonderful cruises that were once reserved for the aristocracy of blood or money. It is this kind of egalitarian distribution of pleasures, this large community around shared pleasures, that allows us to say that, in a way, in our countries at least, and even if they are often bored, people are fairly happy. That is why I speak of progress. And that is also why our society loves these areas, these regions which, on the other hand, can be considered reserves of misery and which give our charitable feelings an opportunity to be exercised...

An equalization of pleasures

J.-P. Lebrun: It is true that the proliferation of opportunities for enjoyment offered by the new psychic economy can seem favor, or even promote the egalitarianization of

pleasures. But isn't the desire for egalitarianism doomed to failure, isn't it bound to come up against an impossible obstacle?

ch. melman: We have seen these demands for equality and parity develop. After all, why not? It is a wonderful ideal. This egalitarian aspiration has haunted humanity for a long time. But in your practice as a psychoanalyst, have you ever observed an emotional, romantic, or social balance based on equality and parity? Why doesn't it work? Take a homosexual couple. We know that they strive to achieve this equality, and yet, inevitably, as we have already said, a disharmony, an otherness emerges between them. Why? It must come from somewhere. Otherness, this dimension that we continue to reject in our various demands to ensure a sense of community and belonging, is obviously inherent in language itself, in language as such. No matter how much we stamp our feet or enact whatever laws we want, this will not change, and our relationships will continue to be governed and organized by this dimension of otherness, by disparity.

Consider, for example, the error made by Simone de Beauvoir in the title of her book *The Second Sex*: the fact that there are two sexes does not necessarily mean that one is superior to the other. The cardinal does not necessarily imply the ordinal. It is sufficient that the two elements are different, heterogeneous in relation to each other, to prevent them from being classified in the same series. This happens to be precisely the case for a man and a woman. As a result, they represent the paradigm of otherness.

J.-P. Lebrun: We are also hearing more and more about "psychological suffering," a concept I would like you to comment on. More than ever before, we are dealing with people who are suffering psychologically...

CH. Melman: Psychological suffering, because it is one of the prices to pay for the emergence of a new economy: the existence of the

subject is obliterated. We have all become a kind of civil servant, caught up in a system where we have to ensure, guarantee, and produce the "well-being" and satisfaction of those around us. This includes parents, whose new codes of parenthood will specify very precisely their obligations as educators: they must ensure the "well-being" of their children. Any failure to fulfill this new role as civil servants of the system will be immediately punishable by law: seeking to deny satisfaction to transsexuals, homosexual couples, elderly women who wish to become pregnant—and other types of satisfaction tomorrow, no doubt—is now considered an offense against morality. The right of the citizen is the right to perfect and complete satisfaction.

J.-P. Lebrun: The law itself now serves this claim to satisfaction...

Ch. Melman: The law, in fact, is used to achieve this satisfaction. Anything that stands in the way is swept aside as politically and morally incorrect. And has no audience.

J.-P. Lebrun: So, in France, we have just allowed individuals to choose their own surname! Food for thought for psychoanalysts! What do you think?

ch. melman: We have legislated on surnames as if it were a secondary issue, like any other. As if we were saying: why should the newcomer to the family be burdened with a history, debts, duties, obligations, this whole meaningful universe that already exists and sticks to him before he even has time to cry? Maybe that's why the child cries! Because he understands that he's already carrying a heavy burden. He's smart, he reacts immediately! We have freed ourselves from patriarchy, so why not use matronyms instead of surnames? No one, however, notices that matronyms, in this case, are not really matronyms, they are still surnames,

since it is the name of this woman's father. The fact remains that we are simply going to validate, within our families, this old quarrel, which is usually more muted: whether children "produced" within a couple should follow the father's line or the mother's. We all know that this is a very common dilemma, that the patriarchal family is long gone, that our rules of exchange have become more flexible, and that it often happens that children, even when they bear their father's name, actually continue their mother's lineage. In the same vein, we will soon allow all first names, even the most fanciful ones, as is already the case in the United States, where it is said that this is a way of homogenizing cultural diversity. No one asks what this means in terms of the child's human development, of becoming part of a lineage, a memory, and having to bear that burden, particularly through their name.

The fate of great texts

J.-P. Lebrun: Once again, it is the question of debt that is being erased! You sometimes mention, and not without reason, the fact that we no longer refer to texts, to those texts to which we owe so much...

CH. Melman: Our culture is characterized by having always been dependent, since the Greeks, on great texts, whether secular or sacred, or even prescriptive and political. Great, in the sense that their poetry has served to organize our morals and our conduct. I am thinking as much of Homer, whose writings were truly a source of support, guidance, and inspiration for the people who invented everything for us, as of the texts that we subsequently treated as sacred texts or tutelary narratives, capable of guiding us, from the Pentateuch to the Gospels and even Marx. I would point out that for centuries we adopted a hermeneutic attitude towards them.

Thanks to their poetic writing, these texts establish a number of impossibilities, which can be interpreted as prohibitions. And they evoke the various ways of dealing with them. Take Homer, for example. In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, he recounts expeditions, admirable and incredible encounters, dangers to be faced, but also, at the same time, the discovery by a population of the deceptive power of speech and what might be legitimate in its deceptive use. This is one of the contributions of the text which, already, testifies to a line of thinking that I find interesting.

With sacred texts, I believe we are also dealing with a picaresque form. The Pentateuch recounts a series of journeys and adventures, which are very realistic, in a language of admirable crudeness, which unfortunately has been lost in the French translation. Other translations have avoided this watering down and have even allowed the text to influence, or even produce, essential national characteristics, both in England and Germany, for example. The very direct, very wild version of the Pentateuch available to the English, in particular, still has consequences today. In these sacred texts, the various possible combinations of family and social encounters are exhausted, and the behaviors considered to be the least bad are highlighted and valued. Let's take an example: the right of primogeniture. It is extraordinary to see that, in the first text of the Pentateuch, the "character" who is ultimately recognized and valued is the resourceful youngster who shows that the elder, who believes that everything is his by right, must in fact work hard, while he, the younger brother, behaves in a way that is sometimes dramatically inappropriate, even criminal. This is how these texts ensured that things happened "as they should" for generations to continue. They contain a wealth of knowledge that continues to inspire us and remain relevant.

We have lived in a transferential position, in the psychoanalytic sense of the term, with regard to these great texts. These writings, as repositories of knowledge, could obviously give rise to a radical and permanent transfer. Writings, therefore, that can hold us by the hand and, at the same time, help us to stand upright.

J.-P. Lebrun: This is, *incidentally*, how Lyotard defined postmodernity: the end of grand narratives! Is this debt to the great texts no longer relevant today?

Ch. Melman: I don't think so. On the contrary, this is what cognitivist ideology would have us believe—because it is indeed an ideology, as can be demonstrated. What does cognitivism stipulate? We receive a certain amount of information from the world that is directly processed by the machine that we are—we are in fact assimilated by this approach not to an animal but to a machine, to something that is defined as a set of circuits. Thanks to this processing, we are able, when faced with situations we encounter, to provide responses that could be appropriate and correct... if we were sufficiently well oriented. And if we do indeed suffer from defects, these are defects in the processing of the information received, so all we need to do is rehabilitate the circuits and procedures to remedy them. All we need is to be well connected! This ideology interests us because it involves abandoning all "vertical" references—particularly to major texts—in organizing our behavior. These references have always shaped our relationship with the world, which has never been naive, innocent, or straightforward.

A subject finally free!

J.-P. Lebrun: Since we are talking about debt, I would like to ask a question, a slightly provocative, which will perhaps allow you to

clarify your thoughts. We are familiar with Lacan's famous phrase: "The analyst is only authorized by himself." Couldn't this be applied to the subject in a certain way? Isn't a subject, after all, someone who can ultimately only support himself?

ch. melman: The problem is that the subject is phobic, he needs some kind of [horse17](#) to come and support the boundaries of his territory, to tell him what limits he must not cross. That's the difficulty! We would certainly like to see a subject that only allows itself to exist, but such a subject is utopian. Lacan certainly said that desire could only allow itself to exist, but in fact, this is rather rare... It is possible, of course, and fortunately so, but it is not the most common case.

J.-P. Lebrun: At the same time, with a subject that only allows itself to exist, wouldn't we be approaching a definition of the boundless individualism that is developing today?

CH. Melman: Oh no, not at all! Allowing oneself to exist is not at all the same as functioning without limits. On the contrary, it is recognizing the limits that constrain one's own existence, in other words, that enable it and prevent its annihilation in the coma of complete satisfaction.

J.-P. LEBRUN: This discourse on limits, like everything you argue here, gives me the impression, to put it simply, that you are speaking from a position of authority that the generation following you no longer has...

CH. Melman: I agree...

J.-P. Lebrun: You are in a position to make a series of observations given the place you occupy, but you may not realize that, deep down, the generation that follows you no longer has that place, that it can no longer count on its existence. It therefore has no choice but to take a step further and take into account what you describe. And that is a real difficulty for

Psychologists, educators, and many others. Let's take the question of authority, for example. Anyone starting their professional life today, such as a young teacher, is forced to confront these mechanisms, whose shortcomings you have highlighted so well, in order to legitimize their authority. This means, to a greater or lesser extent, accepting them. And one might think that in doing so, they risk reinforcing these mechanisms and rushing headlong into this new psychic economy. What can we do in such a situation? How can we take it into account and, at the same time, help those who are trying, against all odds, to react and refuse to resign themselves, even though they no longer have the weapons that you still seem to have at your disposal...

ch. melman: Once again, you seem more or less revolted by the idea that there may be no satisfactory solution, that there is no royal road to containing the consequences of the emergence of this new psychic economy...

J.-P. Lebrun: I am willing to accept that rebellion, yes...

ch. melman: That's a good question. Is there a way? Let me remind you of what Lacan said: "The proletarian is not a slave to his master, but to his enjoyment." That sentence is incredibly rich. Well, what we see today is precisely that: there is no longer a master in our cultures; the boss is jouissance. So much so that, if you'll allow me this ironic comment, we are witnessing an astonishing proletarian victory that Marx did not foresee: the proletarianization of the whole of society. All proletarians! All servants! All captives, obedient to enjoyment! The great event, as we have already shown, is that there is no longer any phallic enjoyment. Today, there is no longer any enjoyment except that of this object "constructed" from partial objects, this object that Lacan called the object petit a *. In the West, we live in a cult of dishonor. Honor is no longer a value, no longer worth anything on the

market, seems outdated, even reactionary. This is hardly surprising, given that we are witnessing the triumph of the object a, that is, of waste. Just look at the style of our relationships... But to come back to your question—is there another way out?—I would say that, in my opinion, there isn't, even if that seems pessimistic. If only because humanity's deepest desire is to die, to disappear.

The death drive

J.-P. Lebrun: The fulfillment of the death drive, then!

ch. melman: The fulfillment of the death drive, indeed. Freud was already surprised by this, but it is the wish of humanity. And, in a way, one could say that we are moving towards the fulfillment of this wish. Isn't this famous object a* found behind the figure of pollution, which becomes threatening in reality? We are increasingly capable of making life impossible on the surface of our planet, and we are working to do so, in particular by encouraging a certain type of industrial development in the so-called Third World countries, which leads to particularly polluting modes of production. And, at the same time, as we have seen with the Kyoto Protocol, the United States is setting an example by refusing to commit to controlling its own excesses!

How can we interpret such behavior when experts know that there is a real danger of disrupting the functioning of the planet to such an extent that biological life becomes impossible? Biological life, our life, is an accident: an accident is not necessarily eternal!

J.-P. Lebrun: On the subject of the death drive, you will no doubt remember that Freud added a sentence at the end of the second edition of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, published shortly after the Nazis entered the Reichstag, in which he refers to the struggle between two

adversaries: life instincts and death instincts. A sentence that simply says: "But who can presume the success and the outcome?"

CH. Melman: One could even say, if we are to believe the major cases that Freud studied and reported, that it is the death drive that always wins out.

J.-P. Lebrun: Is this inevitable? Can you elaborate?

CH. Melman: How did [Dora's](#) story end? With a little woman who coughed, was skinny, sick, and died at an early age. The Rat Man disappeared at the front. The Wolf Man was perpetually ill, even living as a "professional" invalid, always performing until after retirement! Little Hans was perhaps the one who fared best, giving his life a completely different direction by devoting himself to music. But was he really doing so well? I don't know, I'm not familiar with the documents available on his adult life. There are no cases among Freud's major psychoanalyses that give particular cause for celebration. As for the analysts who surrounded Freud, they were a bunch of formidable lunatics, often aggressive and nasty. And I'm obviously not going to start talking about those who surrounded Lacan; I'll leave you to judge for yourselves. Isn't what psychoanalysis ultimately reveals the deep desire of every subject to put an end to everything that disturbs them? So he's fed up with sex. Sure, it's a prerequisite for reproduction, but why not delegate it?

J.-P. Lebrun: Do you think that the possibility of blocking the death drive has been reduced in the context of the new psychic economy?

Ch. Melman: The thing about the new psychic economy is that it doesn't encourage us to hold back the death drive at all—it actually encourages it! When all you want is complete satisfaction, staying alive isn't a limiting factor at all.

J.-P. Lebrun: So, if this new economy were to prevail completely, we would be all the more driven by the death drive...

CH. Melman: Absolutely.

J.-P. Lebrun: We would offer less and less resistance to it...

CH. Melman: Certainly. You might say that this contradicts all the statistics, which show that life expectancy is increasing. That's true, it's completely contradictory.

J.-P. Lebrun: No doubt, because longer life expectancy does not necessarily mean that we live more, that we really live, as we know...

ch. melman: It's not enough, in fact, to extend the length of the journey to be more alive.

The father today? A comedian...

J.-P. Lebrun: Could we go back for a moment to what you said earlier, namely that the condemnation of the father is ultimately a condemnation of sexual desire.

Ch. Melman: It's a condemnation of sex. Because

— let's go back to that — what is a father, if not the one who introduces, into the sweetness of the bond between a mother and her child, the traumatic violence of sex? What else is he? He is the one who comes and breaks the harmony — the delicious harmony — that characterizes the relationship between a mother and her child. And he does so brutally.

J.-P. Lebrun: No doubt. But is patriarchy based purely and simply on this dimension of the father?

CH. Melman: Patriarchy is the type of order that, by creating this break and disharmony between mother and child, introduces the child to sex. That's what patriarchy is. An order that first

organizes the subjective status of the child and then, at the same time, opens up access to genitality.

J.-P. Lebrun: But we could also say that patriarchy did not have only virtues. In particular, it proved incapable of allowing the recognition of women's desire, of women's voices...

CH. Melman: But who said there was such a thing as female desire? Who said there was such a thing as female speech?

J.-P. Lebrun: Still, in concrete terms, you can't deny that since patriarchy has been challenged, we have observed, in particular, that women have had easier access to speech!

CH. Melman: There is no male or female voice, there is simply a voice. And desire is not female or male, it simply is. This is what Freud so remarkably revealed: libido is *one*.

J.-P. Lebrun: Yes... but I can't quite follow you when you view patriarchy in this way, simply equating it with an order linked to a "traumatizing" father, the one you just described. Isn't that reductive?

CH. Melman: But otherwise, there is no father! If the father is not that, then he's a joke, he's not a father. In some African societies, where the biological father simply drops in from time to time at the home of his wife and the children he has fathered to exchange a few jokes, it is the mother's brother—known as the *avunculus*—who represents authority over the children.

J.-P. Lebrun: So, according to you, there is no salvation outside of patriarchy. If it disappears, we are doomed to move on to the new psychic economy...

CH. Melman: I didn't say there was no salvation outside patriarchy. I am by no means a defender of patriarchy! I am

simply in the position of an analyst, and therefore in a position to report on a number of phenomena. That's all. It is not my place to attack or praise the developments I observe.

J.-P. Lebrun: The question remains: is the existence of patriarchy necessary, even indispensable, for the place of the father to be recognized?

CH. Melman: The place of the father can only depend on patriarchy. Otherwise, the father is the guy we know today, a poor guy, even a comedian. Where can he derive his authority in a family, if not from the value accorded to patriarchy? A father cannot authorize himself; he can only authorize himself through patriarchy. And if he wants to authorize himself at all costs, we are dealing with a violent, brutal father, the kind who sometimes ends up in court.

J.-P. Lebrun: What you are saying, basically, is that we do not recognize enough that authority limits power...

CH. Melman: I completely agree with what you just said: authority is what limits power. And when theological regimes seek to ensure collusion, to come back to one of your questions, between power and authority, it's a disaster. Because it leads to the legitimization of powers that no longer have any limits.

J.-P. Lebrun: What do you have in mind specifically?

CH. Melman: I couldn't be clearer: it's what we call fundamentalism.

J.-P. Lebrun: But it seems to me that we can also see things differently. Isn't it when we no longer leave enough room for authority that we also, in another way, open the door to power and reinforce it?

CH. Melman: No doubt. But the simplest way to reinforce it is still to confuse power and authority. When

the person who has authority is also the person who has power, it's direct and without any possible limitation.

J.-P. Lebrun: Do you think patriarchy is directly linked to religion?

Ch. Melman: The facts show that this is not the case. Patriarchy, as it existed among the Romans, appeared well before and independently of the establishment of the Christian religion. At that time, we were dealing with a civil authority that was self-sufficient.

J.-P. Lebrun: If we accept that there is no necessary link between religion and patriarchy, that is a crucial point. Do you really support this thesis?

Ch. Melman: It is historically proven.

J.-P. Lebrun: So, in your view, there is really no other solution than patriarchy to ensure the father's place, to make the exercise of fatherhood possible and acceptable, other than through violence?

ch. melman: Absolutely. There is no other way. I have already mentioned elsewhere what happens in societies where, for historical reasons, sometimes linked to colonization, communities have retained no reference to the figure of a common father. Fathers, in these conditions, are simply nocturnal sexual visitors. They have no other power. They are reduced to their role as progenitors, as reproducers, as in zoology.

J.-P. Lebrun: Just like in zoology! Could this be a way of talking about the change in our relationship with the unconscious that is heralded by the advent of this new psychic economy?

Ch. Melman: That is, of course, an essential question. I don't think it can be answered *off the cuff*. Let me just say, however, that I think we are moving towards the disappearance, not of the unconscious in the Freudian sense of the term, but of the subject of the unconscious. We will be dealing, in a way, with an unconscious that

no longer has an interlocutor. There will no longer be any desire to be recognized, nor any utterance as a subject. We will have a singular, strange return to what was the pre-Cartesian situation, before the appearance of the "I" of cogito. There will be voices from the depths, diabolical voices that the subject will not recognize as his own. It does not seem at all impossible that we are moving fairly quickly toward such a configuration.

J.-P. Lebrun: Does this mean, once again, that we are moving towards psychosis rather than perversion?

Ch. Melman: Lacan might have replied that we are emerging from paranoia and entering schizophrenia!

A stateless subject

J.-P. Lebrun: Can we return to the clinic and continue to try to distinguish the most salient features that would characterize a subject functioning in this new psychic economy...

Ch. Melman: We would first need to clarify what the status of the subject is today.

J.-P. Lebrun: You said that the subject, as we know it, has been abolished...

Ch. Melman: And that the subject no longer finds a *home*, a home, a place...

J.-P. Lebrun: That he was homeless, that he no longer had a place to live...

Ch. Melman: That he no longer had a home, and that, in a way, he had also become stateless. I think that current regionalist movements are enjoying a certain degree of success because they represent a reaction to this increasingly stateless nature of the subject. A subject who, at the same time, has lost his historical references. And who finds himself freed from the traditional relationship that links the subject's existence to a symbolic debt he has to pay...

J.-P. Lebrun: When you say "loss of historical references," we can also hear this very clearly in individual clinical cases: people who come to see us and say they have no history, no reference points that specify their journey...

CH. Melman: Exactly. We see this "man without qualities" that Musil spoke of. With an existence that, in a way, could be considered liberated, but which, on the other hand, proves to be extremely sensitive to suggestion. The absence of reference points, of links with an Other *, which are correlative to the subject's commitment, makes him extremely sensitive to all the injunctions that come from others. Thus, as has been said, the press and the media—what is known as the fourth estate—have replaced the Other to which we once referred through the weight of history, religion, and debt. The result is a subject who is eminently manipulable and manipulated. Even if we theoretically place them at the center of the system, as if they were the decision-makers. It is their choices, their options, their behavior, particularly as consumers, that are said to determine the organization of their world. This justifies our constant polling of them. But their responses to polls are nothing more than what they were taught the day before.

J.-P. Lebrun: We are seeing the emergence of an additional level of control over the subject. We no longer use traditional methods, such as when totalitarian regimes openly and deliberately used classic techniques of control and propaganda to gain a hold over the subject. Today, to achieve this control, we act by emptying the very place of the subject...

CH. Melman: Exactly.

J.-P. Lebrun: We have managed to create a kind of non-place around the subject...

ch. melman: You could say that. But what we need to think about today is above all a form of identification which, it seems to me, has not been identified by either Freud or Lacan and which

consists in the organization of communities gathered around the same jouissance *.

A poor social bond

J.-P. Lebrun: I suppose you are referring to all these gatherings around the same passion or concern, whether they be people suffering from a particular illness, Scrabble players, or stamp collectors... But is the social bond created and offered by these communities of interest really a social bond?

CH. Melman: It is obviously a very poor social bond, since it is based solely on support from others, insofar as others share the same enjoyment. And this enjoyment, due to the very similarity of its followers, its protagonists, becomes a unisex enjoyment...

J.-P. Lebrun: And
mirrored... CH. Melman:
And mirrored.

J.-P. Lebrun: In this system, what is the fate of the psychic instances? What about the superego in such an economy? And what becomes of the ego ideal? What remains of it?

CH. Melman: These two instances are still just as active. Perhaps they will even tend to be unleashed. For today, the ego ideal is increasingly merging with the ideal ego, in that the subject has to ensure its own representation in a way that is as theatrical and aesthetic as possible. And this at a time when the superego still holds its traditional place as an injunction to enjoy, an injunction to go to the end of enjoyment. The superego has always contained this injunction, but in the current configuration, and this is no small difference, there is nothing to restrain it anymore.

J.-P. Lebrun: Which brings us back to those young people you mentioned who have such a need for decibels that they

1. It should be noted that Lacan's interpretation of the superego differs from Freud's: for Freud, the superego is a prohibitive authority; for Lacan, it is also an authority that prescribes enjoyment (see his Seminar of 1972-1973, *Encore*, Éditions du Seuil, 1975).

sometimes suffer from a hearing disorder. Here we are dealing with excess...

CH. Melman: It is clearly excess that has become the norm.

J.-P. Lebrun: And an excess that is not experienced as a one-off transgression...

CH. Melman: Which is not only experienced as a transgression, but as a prescription: the prescription of excess as such.

J.-P. Lebrun: You mentioned the need for challenge. But there is also always a dimension of transgression in perverse behavior...

ch. melman: Indeed.

J.-P. Lebrun: Why is it different in this case? Is this also a characteristic of the new psychic economy?

CH. Melman: We are dealing with moral perversion. Perversion has always had links with morality, but until now these links were complex, with one supporting the other under the guise of disapproval. Whereas now we are faced with a perversion that one might almost call... hygienist.

J.-P. LEBRUN: This is manifested in smoking bans, diets, and our whole relationship with preventive medicine today...

ch. melman: Only hygienism, in fact, constitutes a limit, or rather a pseudo-limit—one that is largely ineffective—to a perversion that is otherwise prescribed. I have never seen so many young girls, for

Take one of the simplest examples: going to middle school or high school with a cigarette in your hand at eight in the morning. It's mind-boggling to see these young girls, who probably can't smoke at home or at school, puffing away like old workers on their way to work. They're there poisoning themselves, slowly suffocating themselves. And it's not a shared pleasure: most of the time, they're alone, doing it for their own pleasure, seeking solitary enjoyment...

J.-P. Lebrun: Here we could almost talk about a perversion of morality...

Ch. Melman: You could say that. In any case, we are no longer dealing with traditional morality, because morality was not organized, until now, by the concern to preserve life: it was organized around the concern to preserve one's honor. It was about remaining dignified. Which is something else entirely. Indignity has become the norm.

And still: what can we do?

J.-P. Lebrun: I am still faced with a difficulty. In describing this new psychic economy, you have repeatedly argued that it makes any transference impossible. And that, because transference is ruled out, the analyst, like any other therapist for that matter, is powerless when people come to see them. On the other hand, I have heard you say here and there that we are still entitled to expect and hope that an analyst will always respond in the most appropriate way possible when he receives a patient. So, don't you think that when faced with someone whose psyche is organized by such an economy, there is something to say, something to signify? Psychoanalysts, especially outside of their therapeutic practice, have probably all encountered subjects caught up in this dynamic. I am thinking, for example, of those who are brought to us because they have engaged in

sexual touching of their children, not as part of deliberate transgressive behavior, but rather because they are in a state of anomie, truly without limits. We can clearly see that these subjects have difficulty imagining what remains a transgression. They realize that their behavior is not right. No doubt there remains a small hope that they will realize this, that there is a place where this awareness is possible. But why would they agree to make room for limits, for prohibitions? In the name of what would they place themselves once again in an economy that will impose a loss of enjoyment on them? When they arrive at the analyst's or therapist's office, often following a court decision, it is obvious that there is little we can do...

CH. Melman: That we can neither educate nor govern them.

J.-P. Lebrun: Nevertheless, even in these cases, don't we also have to provide what you call the most appropriate response possible? Doesn't this situation call for words, something that is not just neutral behavior, abstinence?

CH. Melman: I think we can tell them that a society where parents—starting with themselves—consume their own children is a society that is coming to an end.

This leads us to ask them this question: do they intend to bring about their own demise and that of their children? A society that has become endogamous and consumes its own children is a society that is dying. The only thing we can do is confront them with this fact and ask them if...

J.-P. Lebrun: If that's what they want?

Ch. Melman: If that's what they want. Make them understand that this is what their actions mean.

J.-P. Lebrun: Precisely, it's not the same as saying nothing to them.

CH. Melman: Of course not! We have to tell them that. But that doesn't mean we want to bring them back to a duty of paternity. We'll simply clarify the meaning of their gesture.

J.-P. Lebrun: I completely agree with that point of view. But in doing so, we are almost defining a new economy for the analyst...

CH. Melman: But it's obvious that the analyst necessarily has one! He has no choice!

J.-P. Lebrun: Of course he has one. But we are talking here about a new, non-traditional way of behaving with patients...

ch. melman: Is it so far removed from our traditional way of working when we hear about confronting a subject with the meaning of their behavior?

J.-P. Lebrun: Except that in this case, the intervention must be quick, must be done very early on in the interviews, which is not usual for a psychoanalyst...

ch. melman: It's quick because what we have to tell the patient is something they don't know, whereas the analyst, in such a case, can know it right away, or almost right away. Their duty of brotherhood is therefore to draw the attention of the person they are treating to this point. It's almost less a duty of the analyst than a duty of brotherhood.

J.-P. Lebrun: Although we don't often hear people talk about brotherhood in this way! Especially in situations like this! You probably need to have been in analysis yourself to recognize that there is a duty of brotherhood here!

Ch. Melman: Perhaps.

J.-P. Lebrun: Would you agree, then, that in the context of this new psychic economy, the analyst can remain a last refuge for the subject?

CH. Melman: In the face of remarkable scientific progress, the existence of the unconscious is surely a refuge for humanity. It is ultimately the last place that provides shelter for the subject, puts them in a position to withdraw, and thus to look back on the course of their life, to judge it, and to be capable of making decisions. All this is not self-evident, it is not a given. As historical experiences, for example under Nazism, have shown, we can very well find ourselves constrained by laws, duly written moreover, which take away our power to decide. And we can only comply with them—we cannot do otherwise!—simply because we want to remain socially valid.

It is quite clear that scientific progress "blocks" us as subjects—I will come back to this. Science is increasingly present, demanding, and fast-paced. It is the organizer, the companion that regulates most of our world. It puts us in a situation where it is increasingly difficult for us to assert ourselves, to be considered as subjects.

When science takes the place of text

J.-P. Lebrun: Does science, in our culture, thus take the place of text?

Ch. Melman: Yes, previously, text was the foundation of our culture. Our culture, and this is what distinguishes it from many others—even if they too obviously have their myths, tales, and stories—has this absolutely exceptional characteristic: it has never functioned outside of text, if I may say so. So much so that one of them, as we have seen, the Pentateuch, an apparently picaresque narrative, has become a sacred text. We live in an age marked by the devaluation of the textual. In favor of power, efficiency, and the relentless, unforgiving rigor of numbers. It is no longer a question of

revealed words, but of writing numbers as they govern the order to which we can only submit.

J.-P. Lebrun: In what way does scientific writing no longer leave room for the subject?

ch. melman: Scientific writing, which is logically and mathematically determined, excludes from its scope, dismisses, and rejects anything that has to do with any kind of interruption, interference, error, or the unexpected... It effectively rejects everything implied by the necessarily approximate intervention of a subject. It dispenses with any subject that speaks, exists or even lives. In a way, it is capable of organizing itself, as modern machines do, including, if necessary, to the detriment of the person who programmed the machine. Unlike the language in which we are "immersed" from birth, scientific writing prohibits any breaks—any space that might escape its grasp—and this forecloses the place that could constitute the hiding place of an existence, and therefore the very possibility of a "subject effect."

What characterizes a scientific approach is precisely that the experimenter has nothing to do with the subject. This is not like shamanism or magic; in fact, it is what differentiates these types of approaches. Soon, this exclusion of the subject will affect medicine. Already, the fact that machines are increasingly used to examine patients, or even that we have to press a button to fill a prescription, poses many problems for medicine. For, at the same time, the subject who is the bearer of the disease is denied by this scientific treatment. But they need to be taken into account; they want to be heard somewhere. And this brings us to a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, we have the development of increasingly rigorous medicine, which is undoubtedly effective and wonderfully scientific; and on the other hand, we have the proliferation of magical practices by therapists of all kinds!

J.-P. Lebrun: You say that science thus bars the subject...
Can you explain what you mean by that?

ch. melman: I mean that science shifts the subject from the realm of statements—the "I" of everyday speech—to the realm of enunciation, to the realm of the "real," where this singular phenomenon, this kind of miracle of the unconscious, then occurs: I am talking to you, and I truly believe that my identity, my social function, my background seem well established; I think I know where I am going, what I want, what I hear people saying, and suddenly it happens—as Lacan points out, that is the unconscious!

—something bursts in and speaks. The unconscious speaks. In various ways, for example through slips of the tongue, missed actions, etc. That is the miracle, the great mystery: the unconscious is gifted with speech; it is almost the profane or secular form of revelation. It speaks, and if it is endowed with speech, it is because there is precisely a subject there, the subject of the unconscious, which is animated by the desire to be recognized.

J.-P. Lebrun: But then, where will this subject be able to sustain itself from now on? If it can no longer rely on the so-called sacred text, and if it has no place in scientific writing...

CH. Melman: To answer that, we can only refer to what Lacan proposed for our consideration when he said that "the subject of the unconscious is the subject of science." At the same time, it appears that psychoanalysts are linked to science. I am not sure that we always appreciate the decisive nature of this formulation. Why? Because, for Freud, the subject of the unconscious is the subject of religion. And the place he gave to the Oedipus complex clearly shows us how, for him, the existence of a subject in the unconscious is entirely determined by the relationship with the father. Insofar as the father is then read as the one who is at the origin of dissatisfaction, the subject's journey will be organized as an attempt to settle accounts with this father.

This is why Lacan says that Freud ultimately tries to save the father, to make him the determining factor of both our existence and what structures our desire.

On the other hand, for Lacan, things must be taken differently. It is in the very play of language, of the letter, in its very exercise, that there is a process, a mechanism that causes the chain of signifiers * to exclude—repress—this or that element at a given moment. For this element proves incompatible with the organization proper to this chain. In the introduction to *Écrits*, in the text on Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," Lacan draws on Markov's chain to show how the functioning of a literal chain, its very physics, implies that at some point in its course, a particular element is foreclosed, rejected, forbidden to be present. For Lacan, there is therefore no need to invoke a prohibitive will to establish primal repression and the subject of the unconscious. There is no need to evoke a commanding figure who comes along at a certain moment in the chain to prohibit the presence of a certain number of elements. The very functioning of the language chain includes this fall. It is therefore sufficient to be a speaking being.

J.-P. Lebrun: But then, if we adopt this perspective, without direct reference to the Oedipus complex, how can we explain that this subject is systematically driven by sexuality? Why, in a way, is it also monoideal?

ch. melman: It is legitimate to think that it is the conjunction between what Lacan calls the Name-of-the-Father and the fall of these elements of the chain that we have just mentioned that sexualizes the unconscious. The unconscious does not *a priori* have to be sexual. The repressed elements—in other words, the unconscious—could very well have no meaning whatsoever. They could very well support nothing, mean nothing, if it weren't for this conjunction with the Name-of-the-Father, that is, what we consent to sacrifice in the name of our love for the father

we consent to sacrifice. We give the father, as Lacan says, the cause of our desire; we entrust him to guide us. Thus, it is the unconscious that, in the best case scenario, guides us in our sexuality, thanks to this conjunction that has come about between physiologically repressed elements of the signifying chain and the sexual meaning given to them by the reference to the Name-of-the-Father, which also refers to a loss, to an impossibility.

An unconscious without sex?

J.-P. Lebrun: So it is the father who is responsible for this sexualization of the unconscious, which, in a way, sexualizes the impossible. If this is the case, what changes are we likely to face?

CH. Melman: It is interesting to note that, while scientific progress now allows a subject to express itself, this subject is by no means the subject of desire, but rather the subject of demand or need. This is precisely because science, with all its considerable merits, is increasingly able to satisfy—at least in appearance—these needs and demands. The population is growing, but science is proving increasingly capable, thanks to its technical resources, of satisfying all the essential needs of a rapidly expanding population, starting, of course, with food. So there is a self-interested recognition by science of a subject of need and a subject of demand that it believes it can satisfy.

But also, and above all, science will demonstrate its ability to "treat"—to silence!—the subject of desire, this unconscious subject that preoccupies us, by organizing sexual enjoyment in such a way that it can be assured at will. We have and will have more and more means to allow this apparently satisfying access to sexual enjoyment. In this respect, we

can speak of progress, of an important advance, consistent with the liberal evolution of morals. But we must also observe that, in this advance of science, there is also the permanent quest to resolve the impossible that animates all discourse, the fundamental dissatisfaction linked to our dependence on language. In other words, to achieve this progress in the evolution of morals, which none of us, whatever our strength, intentions or authority, can oppose, and which is irrevocably in line with the right of each individual to achieve their supposed satisfaction as they see fit.

J.-p. Lebrun: Is it science that legitimizes all this?

CH. Melman: Indeed, it is the discourse of science that, by by "treating" the subject in this way, brings to ethics a kind of rectification, transformation, or mutation that raises questions for all of us in various ways. To such an extent, as I have already said, that we may wonder whether, in the end, the unconscious will necessarily retain its sexual status, its sexual reality. For the unconscious, once again, may not have any sexual reality. If we abandon the reference to the Name-of-the-Father in order to give a sexual meaning to what is repressed, to what has fallen out of the literal chain, we could very well end up with an unconscious that no longer has the sexual meaning that characterizes it today.

We will always be dealing, in one way or another, with the presence of a subject of the unconscious, a subject of enunciation. But we can imagine that, increasingly, this subject will no longer know what it wants, since it will have lost its orientation, its sexualization. So what will be expressed in this place of the unconscious may take on perfectly multiform, enigmatic, strange, bizarre characteristics.

J.-P. Lebrun: In other words, we return here to the central question you raised earlier: the possibility of the

disappearance of the subject of the unconscious in the new psychic economy...

Ch. Melman: You are well aware of the place occupied, particularly today, by the fantastic in both literature and cinema. However, we have seen a renewal of the figures that support it, and this in a decidedly desexualized universe. These figures have become much stranger and more threatening than before, all the more strange and threatening because we do not know what they want or what they are doing there. We often don't know why they have arrived there or what interests them. In other words, we seem to be living in an era where it is no longer the answer provided by a father that offers sexual pleasure, the sexual program. We could possibly see, in these new configurations of the fantastic, the emergence on the scene of the figure of the Other, but a "big Other" to whom we can no longer attribute any expectations or desires. This makes it all the more frightening.

J.-P. Lebrun: Could it be that we are haunted by such figures—as we are seeing more and more in comics and current science fiction?

- that tomorrow's patients will come to see us?

ch. melman: Psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists too, are very fortunate, I think, if I may say so, because they can already observe this state of dereliction, of profound subjective malaise and fundamental dissatisfaction in which the people who come to see them find themselves. Because it is well known that the analyst's office remains one of the few places where such individuals can hope for this: recognition of their existence that does not confuse them with machines, that is respectful towards them, that provides a place where this existence can actually find a foothold.

J.-P. Lebrun: So you argue that, in the face of this remarkable progress in science, the existence of the unconscious remains an antidote to dehumanization.

CH. Melman: You could say that. But if it is true that the support of the unconscious tends to no longer be sexual, if it is true that the infinitely Other reveals itself in a raw way in its representations, then both practical and ethical questions arise for psychoanalysts, and not only for them. We need to gather some data to support us in our attempt not to be swept away by a social tide, by this social demand that wants to impose on us a behavior of absolute correctness, when the unconscious, as you know, is the ultimate in incorrectness.

V.

J.-P. Lebrun: If we dared to equate the laws of language with the laws of gravity, could we think that, basically, you are telling us that with this "new psychic economy," certain subjects find themselves in a state of weightlessness...

CH. Melman: Just one reservation. I don't think we can say that the laws of language are identical to the laws of gravity. For the laws of language are such that they lend themselves to different formalizations, and therefore to different effects, whereas gravity obeys an immutable order that we cannot disturb. We

We do not yet have the power to correct the movement of the planets, but we do have the power to change the laws of language. These laws are not products of nature like the laws of gravity; they constitute an order that can be described, among other things, as symbolic, and therefore lend themselves to different arrangements, interpretations, and regulations. With the laws of language, to use your comparison, we can move the planets around which we psychically revolve...

J.-P. Lebrun: Ultimately, that would be the disadvantage of our advantage, unless it is the other way around. If what

is human is precisely not natural, if it is even what characterizes humans to be able to leave this natural state, then obviously we are in a position to change what we depend on...

CH. Melman: Exactly. And the new psychic economy is an illustration of this: it reflects an attempt to avoid the dead ends to which the laws we have been subject to until now have led us. It is an attempt at "liberation"—with all that this term implies, since there is no liberation that does not lead to disillusionment—from the constraints imposed by the type of subject arrangement that had been in place until then.

J.-P. Lebrun: That's what I mean by weightlessness. Today, we're dealing with subjects who seem to have freed themselves from these laws...

Ch. Melman: Certainly. And your metaphor is particularly apt: we seem to be faced with subjects that have been unmoored. But be careful, this is a deceptive appearance. For we only have this impression insofar as what seemed essential to us was the anchoring to the paternal divine authority, an authority to which we thought we owed our verticality, if only because of its imaginary position in the sky. Today, we have the feeling that we are dealing with unanchored subjects, when

in reality they are revolving completely freely around a new planet, which governs our existence much more drastically than the previous superego imperative. And this new planet is represented by the object—the object of enjoyment—which guides the subject's existence. The last anchor, or the only one we have today, around which the entire planet is beginning to gravitate, is the object!

An unconscious in flux?

J.-P. Lebrun: What change affecting the unconscious could bring about this new positioning of the object?

ch. melman: In this new psychic economy, the object, it seems, is no longer—as we were accustomed to thinking—in the unconscious. In other words, the unconscious no longer presents itself as a place concealing a treasure, a place holding a pleasure that we spend our lives pursuing. This object is now in the realm of reality—which will entail a number of disadvantages—and this shift may lead—this remains to be seen—to a disinvestment of the unconscious. We can attribute a precise date to the investment in the unconscious: the end of the First World War. We will not revisit what may have sparked, after this great collective bloodletting, a desire for individual enjoyment that led to the success of psychoanalysis. But we must remember that the investment in the unconscious, its exposure on the social stage, its activism, are recent phenomena. And we can easily imagine an evolution that would cause this investment to disappear for the reasons I have mentioned. The unconscious would then no longer be the place where the object of enjoyment is hidden, and would thus be emptied of what it is supposed to say. It would no longer
would "speak" anymore!

j.-p. lebrun: You trace the interest in the unconscious back to a particular moment, at the beginning of the 20th century, and I think you are right to do so.

But humans—we can at least say that today, with hindsight—have always had an unconscious, at least since they have been able to speak!

CH. Melman: People have always had an unconscious. But the problem, as I say, is that of its investment, the place it occupies in discourse. The unconscious can very well become once again a simple element that parasitizes the subject, an accessory element, certainly enigmatic, but emptied of its appeal, having lost its capacity for discourse. As it was before for us. And as it has remained for others. Isn't that what Lacan seemed to be saying in what was often taken as a joke about the Japanese, whom he considered unanalyzable? He was talking about "flat" characters, in whom everything is so much on display that one wonders whether they are really subjects of unconscious desire, marked by repression.

J.-P. Lebrun: If we maintain a historical perspective, your interpretation of the new psychic economy seems to me to refer both to what I would call a broad version of patriarchy and to a minimal version. In its broad version, we refer to the patriarchy that organized the entire social sphere until the Revolution, while in its minimal version, we refer to the social model that allowed the father, by supporting his authority, to occupy a position that the future subject had to take into account. Don't you think it would be useful to separate these two versions? Patriarchy as a system linked to the Ancien Régime, and therefore to a specific political system, is now completely outdated. Whereas, without being obsolete, its narrow version, the one you emphasize, is indeed being undermined today, with all the consequences we are examining here. For when society no longer supports the authority of the father, it is no longer possible to ensure the link that connects the unconscious to sexual meaning...

CH. Melman: If I may, I would put it a little differently. The enjoyment established by patriarchy is phallic enjoyment, an essentially narcissistic enjoyment, a kind of comprehensive insurance policy that one gives oneself. This system can be interpreted as an attempt to heal the subject's anxiety by guaranteeing, through the paternal reference, his own identification and therefore his self-love. This comes with all the excesses one can imagine, not least of which is nationalism, which is nothing more than the collective manifestation of this self-love. This patriarchy goes hand in hand with a fantastical organization that is organized around the object. The object as that which is missing from language. The Oedipal interpretation, as we have already seen, effectively organizes the physiology of desire by linking the signifying chain to the Name-of-the-Father, thereby sexualizing the object. Phallic jouissance, therefore, prevents us from fully enjoying the object, since it prohibits the fulfillment of incestuous desire.

The new psychic economy, for its part, as we have said, privileges the jouissance of the object to the detriment of phallic jouissance. Today, we allow ourselves to bypass the latter and grant ourselves the right to satisfy all the jouissances that seem worthwhile to us—and all the more worthwhile because they were forbidden or marked by a limit.

The question to which all this ultimately leads us, and which Lacan asked, is whether it is possible for there to be a genuine sexual relationship, i.e., a relationship with a woman, that is not entirely governed by the patriarchal institution or by the new psychic economy, which implies the subjugation of desire to enjoyment. For in both cases, phallic jouissance and jouissance of the object, there is a radical avoidance of sexual jouissance...

J.-P. Lebrun: No sexual relationship, because enjoyment, in the first case, is only narcissistic and, in the second, presupposes, for the subject, the consumption of and by the object...

ch. melman: Exactly. Which brings me back to the question: could we, despite everything, envisage a jouissance that would be, strictly speaking, a sexual jouissance of the female body? Since, ultimately, women are valued—and this is what our bourgeois marital dramas tell us—either as phallic representatives or as representatives of the object. And it is in this latter capacity that she intervenes in this new economy, whether she wants to or not. She has the right to protest against this role assigned to her, because she is not asked for her opinion. But when she does protest, unfortunately, it is not usually in the sense of opening things up, but rather to demand equality, which only serves to reinforce the great homosexual fantasy of men. Feminism as it is most often expressed, demanding equality in all areas, is just that: participation in the male homosexual fantasy.

J.-P. Lebrun: Still, isn't it above all this increasingly clear dissociation between the act of reproduction and sexual pleasure, which science has recently allowed us to achieve, that truly constitutes the axis around which the change we are talking about has been made possible?

CH. Melman: You are undoubtedly right, because the contemporary solution that science allows us to adopt revolves around how to settle our account with sexuality. Not by seeking a way forward through the question we asked a moment ago: "Could there be sexual intercourse?", but rather by saying: "Let the machines take care of it! Let mechanical, biological, eugenic, remote-controlled processes, etc., take care of sexual activity! Leave us alone with it!" For the

the first time in his history, man no longer has to entrust the burden of his perpetuation to the whims of a force, divine or otherwise, to which it was necessary to sacrifice. The result is a style that recalls a well-known figure, that of the libertine. What is new is that this is now mass libertinism.

The only serious thing: sex

J.-P. Lebrun: You say that science is settling its score with sexuality, in other words, that it is getting rid of the father. But can we really think that we will no longer be able to use the father to give form to the cause of desire?

ch. melman: When it comes to psychological causality, there is only one thing that is serious, only one. And any statement that does not give it a central place should be taken as a defense against the truth. This thing, we know thanks to Freud and since Freud, is sex! Why? Not because we are particularly lustful, of course, but for eminently logical reasons: sex, to this day, is sustained by lack and, at the same time, embodies and represents our subjective truth. It is its enclosure, its defender. From the moment you reject sexuality—and we understand that this is the intention of scientists—when you operate the dissociation you just mentioned, you effectively bring forth subjects that are free of any gravity, completely lightened. I mentioned the gravitational pull around the object, but the subject of this new psychic economy revolves around the object without any style, without any identifiable trajectory, without any assured identity, without any personality. It is characterized by a kind of subjective plasticity that makes it, as a "human animal," available for all kinds of manipulation and susceptible to all kinds of panic as soon as it has nothing left that it can use as a

a bulwark. We can now do whatever we want with it! A sheep!

J.-P. Lebrun: You often come back to this notion of flexibility, this dream of having several lives, several modes of functioning. At the end of a symposium on childhood psychosis, Lacan wondered whether we should talk about the "generalized child" to describe what our behavior is increasingly resembling. Doesn't what you're describing also refer to the child who, in the imagination, is allowed to live all kinds of lives?

CH. Melman: The generalized child! I often ask colleagues: what do you mean by adult, how do you recognize an adult? Generalized child indeed, insofar as we have always linked our behavior, our approach, our regulation as subjects, to the authority of a father. In this respect, it is true that we remain in a position of generalized child. The subject whose behavior is authorized only by himself is, as we know, rather rare and frowned upon. Often, moreover, things will turn out badly for him because he will not know how to defend his interests. So we live in a generalized childhood. Now, could the new psychic economy, with the relationship to the object that it establishes, make us adults? It rather makes us infants, dependent creatures, entirely dependent on satisfaction, as if addicted to it.

J.-P. Lebrun: As analysts, we used to believe that, in order for our intervention to be useful, we had to reach the subject's infantile neurosis. Today, however, there is a growing tendency to say that we need to "touch," or rather attempt to reach, the subject's infantile perversion, what Freud called polymorphous perversion, that is, what remains of that generalized child... Does that seem relevant to you?

CH. Melman: Absolutely!

J.-P. Lebrun: Because, for the patients I have in mind, it's as if nothing had been built. As if we had remained below the level of structuring the subject. I wonder, moreover, whether the interest in borderline states * [20](#) might not be revisited in this sense. Do we not observe, in these subjects, who are said to be increasingly numerous, a lack of structuring, or even a lack of structure *?

ch. melman: We will always find a possible dual mechanism in childhood: infantile neurosis and infantile perversion. And today we see the latter often gaining the upper hand, with the consequence of an increase in borderline * and borderline states.

An overly real transference

J.-P. Lebrun: The emergence of these pathologies is not unrelated, it seems to me, to this new psychic economy which, from the moment the subject emancipates himself from the laws of language, organizes a supposed subjectivity. One could even speak of a pseudo-subject...

CH. Melman: One might think so. I recently saw a young woman of twenty-two, intelligent, friendly, completely lost in life, socially isolated, living mainly at night, unemployed... What is happening to her? It's simple. Any prospect of a future, as a future woman and mother, is completely absent from her mind, precisely because of this disconnection from the paternal authority I mentioned earlier. On the other hand, she is extremely attached to the figure of her grandfather, who is of course deceased. This certainly constitutes a point of connection specific to her life. But with a grandfather, who is also deceased, this is a relationship with a father figure in which sexuality no longer has any place. Only the love for the father figure is nostalgically evoked, without anything sexual. She ekes out a living with subsidies

from her divorced parents, who feel nothing but grief and pain in the face of this situation. Devoid of her usual points of reference, her paternal reference points, she participates, in a way that is no more disastrous than any other, in the great fair, the great festival of pleasure.

This young girl, at least in this respect, appears to be a perfect embodiment of our democracy. She enjoys life like everyone else, but at the same time she is completely lost and feels this painfully and anxiously. She seems to me to be prototypical of what we are talking about. With the presence of a mother who does not want to let her go, we find the theme of the generalized child. The mother is well aware that she cannot detach herself from her daughter. It is only the real, sustained presence of this child that gives her her maternal identity. In other words, she needs a mummified child to reassure herself, the mother, of her identity. And her daughter understands perfectly, of course, that she must accept such an existence to prevent her mother from panicking too much.

I also saw the father, a man who tries to maintain a kind of strict rigor, a weak defense against what he perceives as a permanent overflow, characterizing the relationship between his wife and daughter, who respect no limits, either one or the other. Separated from the mother, he tries to help his daughter a little, desperately clinging to fixed points, to limits that can only be legal. The picture seems exemplary to me.

J.-P. Lebrun: You mention here, in the case of this mother, an element already identified in pathology, namely a woman who needs her daughter to support her identity as a mother. This is not new as such. What is new, however, is that this picture is becoming more widespread.

Ch. Melman: Not only that. The impact of the mother's problem is no longer just present in the unconscious, it is at the forefront.

J.-P. Lebrun: Nowadays, parents need their children to secure their identity as parents...

ch. melman: As for the daughter, she no longer needs to work to discover in her unconscious that her mother wants to keep her; it's out in the open! There is no longer any repression. And in this daughter's unconscious, I don't think there is anything. Nothing that functioned as an object of sacrifice capable of organizing jouissance * and fantasy *. I imagine that she perceives this emptiness and feels empty, uninhabited.

J.-P. Lebrun: Contrary to what is usually said, the unconscious, in this case, no longer represents the persistence of the infantile in us. In its place, in its "location," there is nothing left. Would that be, for you, the true peculiarity of the new psychic economy?

CH. Melman: The infantile is only present in the form of an attachment to reality. And a real, generalized dependence. Except, in this case, with the grandfather. And that is why this young girl is very attached to me, because I am at an age—unfortunately—where I occupy this grandfatherly place for her. She has a kind of total communication with me, with great freedom—one could almost speak of undressing—without any limits. She talks to me as if I were a character she has always known and from whom she expects everything. What does that mean? To be loved. But nothing sexual, of course. Sex does not play a very important role in her life.

J.-P. Lebrun: Because, no doubt, its sudden emergence would surprise her, break into her life... All of this, once again, raises a question for us psychoanalysts. Isn't there a risk that working with these people will ultimately resemble the work we do with children, with child psychoanalysis?

CH. Melman: Absolutely!

J.-P. Lebrun: Particularly because, in a way, whereas previously the role of the psychoanalyst was to enable repression to be lifted by encouraging free association and allowing the chain of signifiers to unfold, now we seem to feel that we must proceed by subtraction. We tell ourselves that this is the only way something interesting can happen for these subjects...

CH. Melman: But where Françoise Dolto, so celebrated for her approach to children, intervened by outrageously "oedipalizing" situations, how can you do that with an adult? With someone who, given their age and responsibilities, can no longer refocus in that way?

J.-P. Lebrun: This question, however, seems to me to have already been asked in the history of psychoanalysis. Whenever we have questioned the processes of active psychoanalysis—with Ferenczi, of course, but also with Melanie Klein and so many others—have we not been addressing the same difficulty and the same theme?

CH. Melman: We could also talk about those who literally lay their hands on their patients, such as haptonomists... This temptation of analysts to get their hands on things! Dolto managed to get her hands on things... but without actually touching them. Take the case of the young girl I just mentioned: how can you be active with her, show a kind of activism that doesn't just reflect the common sense advice of any social worker? You have even less ability to find a place to address her because this deficiency is precisely what she suffers from. She has no place where "it" speaks to her, with which she can mentally and psychologically pursue an inner dialogue.

J.-P. Lebrun: That is really the great difficulty with this type of encounter! Since the place of transfer no longer exists, no longer unfolds spontaneously, one could argue that the possibility of any work is literally mortgaged from the outset. Unless, of course, we say that we must find a way to reconstitute the transfer?

work is literally compromised from the outset. Unless we say that we need to find a way to reconstitute the transference?

ch. melman: Is what this young girl is doing by coming to my house still a form of transference? I'm not sure. I am far too identified, for her, with the figure of her grandfather. And she is not the only one in this situation. I encounter the same difficulty with other patients, who address less a transference figure than a character, a figure experienced as real. And who do not understand at all that this real figure does not intervene in reality, even though, in their eyes, it is legitimately called upon to do so.

J.-P. LEBRUN: A distinction should be made here between repetition and reproduction of a situation, as these patients do not make the distinction, as if everything were "directly connected," without transference, as we said...

ch. melman: Exactly. This intelligent woman comes to tell her grandfather her life story, but in fact she knows nothing about it. It is obvious that this constitutes a complete obstacle to analytical work, since it is really her grandfather who is there, in the flesh. Trying to make her understand that her grandfather

— in this case the analyst, obviously — is tired, that he's dozing off or bored, immediately plunges her into confusion, panic, and anxiety. It's impossible to get her to wonder who the subject is talking to. You see how disengagement is overtaken by attachment to something very real, this grandfather who is indeed dead.

J.-P. Lebrun: Isn't that precisely the trait referred to by those who use the concept of addiction?

ch. melman: Certainly. Yesterday, I had a young woman come to see me because, despite repeated efforts, she and her husband are unable to have children. Yet neither of them has any biological deficiencies. The whole question is why she

is unable to conceive the long-awaited fertilized egg. She is a modern, highly intelligent young woman with a college education, working in an administrative position in Lyon, very responsible, with a husband who is a graduate of the prestigious École Nationale d'Administration. What happened? What is the problem? Well, this young woman, who, as is often the case, is the product of a broken marriage, has organized—self-organized—a world characterized by a complete rejection of the Other*. Everything is rational. This rationality helps her to construct a world without any real otherness, where the Other does not exist. She asks me for help, but there is clearly no transference. She comes to me to ask for help in having this child, but I am treated as some kind of material power. I am supposed to be the one—Santa Claus or the stork—who holds the key, the solution.

A change in the request

J.-P. Lebrun: What you describe seems to me to be increasingly common. We find this kind of scenario in most consultations, not only with analysts, but with psychologists in general. Very often, patients come asking for real intervention, seeking the key to their problems. This is not at all what we used to call a request...

CH. Melman: It is indeed the key they need, the right key that you are supposed to have. You have to take it off your key ring and give it to them.

J.-P. Lebrun: It is no longer a question of analyzing the request, because it is no longer the same as it used to be. It is a request that demands immediate satisfaction...

CH. Melman: The last patient I mentioned was very disappointed because I remained completely silent. She demanded that I talk to her and started crying because I wasn't talking to her. And she ended up agreeing that she had been

organized by shielding herself—an image that is not insignificant when it comes to having a child, because I really don't see how you could penetrate a shielded body—and that she lived like a machine. You understand why I was talking about rationality. So, at that moment, I said to her, "Have you ever seen a machine have children, reproduce?" And she had this absolutely delightful response: "It would take a *deus ex machina*!" Which, of course, prompted me to reply, "You mean a *deus sex machina*?" It is there, between *deus ex machina* and *deus sex machina*, that we may find the path that could lead her elsewhere. Because these are obviously not the same paths at all.

j.-p. lebrun: You mentioned self-organization in relation to this young woman's symptom. Do you mean that we are now in the reign of the "self"?

ch. melman: Unfortunately not! Because what has replaced the Other*, the big Other as the place from which we were likely to receive messages, is, as I have already said, information. Today, everything that presents itself as *self* is in fact entirely manufactured by what comes from this power, precisely identified as such, which is the world of information. Detachment from the Other thus only makes the subject more vulnerable, instead of introducing them to the possibility of self-reflection, self-education, self-responsibility, and a personal commitment to existence.

The subject is placed in a position of involuntary submission to that which acts in a perfectly hypnotic, mesmerizing way. This is a real threat, insofar as mass manipulation—of the masses—once reserved for dictatorial countries, is now also the preserve of democracies. There is no longer any need for a clandestine propaganda chief acting "behind the scenes"; all that is required is for information to become a commodity, which

which gives it certain specific characteristics and implies a particular psychology on the part of the reader or listener. Thus, under the guise of information, elements are put on the market which indirectly return and influence the identification of the receiver. The nature of the message carries with it an identification that the receiver supports without knowing it.

J.-P. Lebrun: I have already heard you mention—and we have discussed this here before—a kind of new identification process that was not identified by either Freud or Lacan. Is that what you are referring to?

Ch. Melman: Indeed. We are not only selling information, but also the type of good conscience that the interlocutor—the receiver—will adorn themselves with.

- who may also be a common scoundrel. They are sold a clear conscience under the guise of information, and they are also sold the correct way of thinking, which exempts them from referring to a clearly formulated ideology. This ideology is present, but only in action. Currently, for example, in France, the murder of a child in a quiet suburb—always suggesting a sexual, perverse crime—is dominating the media in a way that is completely disproportionate to the importance of the event, however tragic it may be. Whatever emotion it may legitimately arouse, this news item does not, *a priori*, have any right to dominate the political, social, or even sentimental or emotional concerns of the reader or listener. The prominence given to this type of event in the headlines deserves to be analyzed closely to identify what it conveys.

Who can decide on responsibility or irresponsibility?

J.-P. Lebrun: Precisely, on the subject of the appeal to emotion that today overshadows reference to reason or judgment, you have

closely followed the recent debate in France on the responsibility of the mentally ill. A new procedure now allows criminal court juries to rule on the criminal irresponsibility of an accused person, thus taking the place that until recently was reserved for psychiatrists. And the classification of mental illness now depends on a kind of popular tribunal. Is this acceptable?

ch. melman: This development may reflect the idea of popular justice, free from the constraints of consulting specialists and experts who base their opinions on their knowledge and which ultimately relies mainly on the impression made by the accused. However, this also discredits knowledge. On another scale, if I may venture the comparison, it is

"Loft Story": public opinion determines who is good and who is not. We are witnessing a shift in where wisdom lies and can be expressed. Professionals are being replaced by a jury. Is this acceptable? It is clear that the popular jury is concerned about its own safety. It will therefore tend to prioritize this factor over other considerations.

J.-P. Lebrun: So it's a need for security that distracts from the real issue?

CH. Melman: The feeling of insecurity is so strong, and the ethical, family and political changes so profound, that it is important for the state to give citizens the feeling that it is looking out for them, that it is a guarantee against harm that may be inflicted on them. The state, or rather its courts, thus finds a way to ensure compensation for the "victim"—in quotation marks, I insist—even though the person ordered to pay cannot in any way be considered guilty. Recently, a child accidentally injured a classmate during rugby practice. The court concluded—obviously—that the child was not responsible for the damage caused, but that his parents were nevertheless liable to compensate the victim's parents. *la victime. Autrement dit les parents d'un innocent sont déclarés suffisamment coupables pour avoir à réparer financièrement un préjudice accidentel!*

parents of an innocent person are found sufficiently guilty to have to pay financial compensation for accidental damage! Such a development in the justice system is clearly part of a more general philosophy, which is that the more uncertain the role of the state becomes in economic regulation and social control, as market liberalization deprives it of its traditional privileges, the more it seeks to demonstrate its vigilance by functioning as a kind of comprehensive insurance company.

J.-P. Lebrun: And when a crime is committed by a mentally ill person?

CH. Melman: When a reprehensible act was committed by a mentally ill person, by someone who was not responsible for their actions, the old penal code, in Article 64, stated that there was neither crime nor offense. Neither crime nor offense, meaning that the materiality of the damage could not be recognized if the perpetrator was in a state of insanity. Today, the state often imprisons and sentences men who are clearly mentally ill to heavy penalties.

We can do better. As we have seen, the state asks jurors to decide on the defendant's responsibility as if the jury possessed the necessary knowledge. This jury is often sensitive, of course, to the fact that they have before them a man on medication, dazed, who can barely respond. But they will convict him, because the needle on the scale has moved enough that it is now the rights of the victim, the rights of the person who suffered the harm, that matter most. The perpetrator of the crime, even if he is a victim par excellence, since he is not responsible and does not know what he has done, will therefore go to prison. It is estimated that today around 17% of the prison population is made up of mentally ill people. We are closing asylums and filling prisons beyond their capacity. I don't know what Michel Foucault would think of such a development...

J.-P. Lebrun: It is a paradox, indeed. It is as if, nowadays, there is no other way to make room for those who are no longer subjects, but pseudo-subjects, than to place them in the position of victims or

that of someone who is always responsible for their actions. In other words, the law of all or nothing...

CH. Melman: In any case, there is no longer any distinction between imputability (to a subject) and responsibility (of a subject). From the moment a wrongdoing is imputable, the person to whom it is imputed is responsible. Even if they were completely absent, as a subject, from their action. Article 64, to return to this point, stated that: "There is no crime or offense when an act is committed in a state of insanity." This was tantamount to saying to the victims: "No! There was no crime or offense, simply because there was no perpetrator and therefore no one responsible. What happened to you was random, a random event that is unavoidable for everyone. That's the way it is: you happened to encounter a madman, a mentally ill person. Even if you are, in fact, a victim, at the same time you are not. Don't try to organize your subjectivity or your claims around this damage, however real it may be, because in reality, since there is no perpetrator, it is pointless. That's just how it turned out, and that's all there is to it."

The new law, however, shifts the focus. First, there is the damage, and second, not necessarily a guilty party, but someone who is responsible. There must be one, and we will find them. And since there has been harm, we will make sure that they repair it. This change is not simply the result of sociological pressures; it reflects a significant shift in thinking, the consequences of which could be considerable.

As a result, we are now dealing only with victims, and every day we discover more who were previously unaware of their fate: the sons who are victims of their fathers, the wives of their husbands, the children of both, the citizens of the laws, the inhabitants of the climate, the lovers of their mistresses, the travelers of accidents, the eaters of junk food, the survivors of pollution, the residents of flood-prone rivers, the newborns with birth defects, the skiers of avalanches, the

truck drivers working 35-hour weeks... Thus, both the exploitation of the proletariat and class struggle are absorbed into a community of trauma: victims of all countries (and all classes), unite! And create chairs of victimology!

This is a matter that concerns each and every one of us, insofar as we are concerned with "mental health." It is not a question of defending the individual against society, against its customs, against its prejudices, against its incapacities. It is about reminding ourselves, as professionals, what it means when a society collectively and imperatively demands compensation for damage and when, forgetting our ability to assess responsibility, we are inclined to give in (we don't want to rock the boat, and then there's the press, etc.). We are wise enough to know that this collective demand for redress does not lead to good results. Because, in such cases, what do those who find themselves in court argue? They all plead irresponsibility: they were only obeying orders, complying with the norm, doing what they were asked to do, they were within their rights. This is precisely why it is useful, as we try to do from time to time, to invite collective reflection on these issues, which should not be limited to specialists. We must rediscover the meaning of irresponsibility!

J.-P. Lebrun: A way of avoiding a general disappearance of randomness...

Ch. Melman: Randomness is invoked less and less: even floods today necessarily have someone to blame. Lacan pointed out in his lecture on cybernetics that by attacking randomness, we were calling into question the possibility of any law. Perhaps this is the challenge of our scientific age, which wants only a theoretical model capable of accounting for every question as its reference point; it is a matter of accepting the facticity of representations that can always be replaced by others

if they prove disturbing, and to be able to substitute yet others if the second ones prove disturbing in turn.

J.-P. Lebrun: It's a bit paradoxical to get rid of randomness only to create, by moving from one model to another, something that is undecidable!

Ch. Melman: Not at all. It's not surprising that, at a time when patriarchy is being called into question, we want to find a culprit in the realm of reality. There used to be a hypothetical God, feared, loved, respected, sometimes denied. Now, the succession of events is no longer linked to a possible divine intention, but to a whole series of very real and necessarily guilty parties.

J.-P. Lebrun: The disappearance of the third party, you mean, leads to reality itself being called upon...

Ch. Melman: The disappearance of the third party has immediate effects. The damaging circumstance is caught up in a dual economy, no longer a tripartite one. It's him or it's not him, and if it's him, if he's blamed for it, he's responsible. More generally, the rejection of any regulating third party leaves the dual exchange open to competition and aggression that are limited only by the law.

J.-P. Lebrun: But Lacan's work did nevertheless make it possible to frame the problem of the third party, the issue of the father, in a different way, by demonstrating the central role of language, with his reading of Oedipus as a myth. How is it that, ultimately, language alone is not enough to bring the third party into existence?

Ch. Melman: It all depends on how we use language. The extreme positivism in which we are immersed today implies—one might say dictates—

a dual relationship with others and with objects. One need only consider the life of a "modern" couple to see how

it quickly boils down to a dual relationship. And once the relationship is dual, we find ourselves back on the battlefield, with one of the two wanting to kill the other. The problem with language is therefore also the problem of how we use it. Who, today, when buying a newspaper, can say that they are only dealing with poetry? Who, when reading a scientific report, thinks that it is just poetry? Poetry, that is to say, a collection of metaphors and metonymies. On the contrary, everyone is deeply convinced that, through their newspaper or scientific journal, they have a direct and immediate connection to the world. Language does not necessarily watch over us. Like sex, it provides shelter; it is our shelter, on the express condition that we agree to see its entrance, its potential, and to use it. Otherwise, we turn language into an obtuse system, the very system of information and communication...

J.-P. Lebrun: And digital!

CH. Melman: Digital technology is the icing on the cake, since we are no longer even dealing with signifiers * but with numbers.

The avatars of transmission

J.-P. Lebrun: What might be the consequences of this emergence of the new psychic economy on transmission? Are we in danger of "producing" generations that no longer feel the duty to transmit?

ch. melman: We no longer pass on anything that would be repulsive to future generations. And we no longer pass anything on because... what did we pass on? What we passed on, the essential thing for any subject, was a state of mind, a way of understanding the world, of behaving, a whole set of elements which, without being explicitly stated anywhere, nevertheless governed attitudes and expressions. Today, transmission—as with language—is no longer "positive":

we pass on real assets or debts. What we see in young people today is what was once reserved for the children of the bourgeoisie: rebellion against what the previous generation wants to pass on. Children no longer receive from their parents the minimal sustenance that could help them live.

What parents now want to pass on to their children is a social position. It's horrible! Well-adjusted children can only want to marginalize themselves. Yet they see their parents entirely captive, entirely preoccupied with acquiring and maintaining a social position. Moreover, the real issue at stake in passing on knowledge is not knowledge itself, but the relationship to knowledge: what matters is what underpins it, its relativity, its uses. But today, the question of foundations—like the question of the father—is no longer on the agenda. Knowledge is only valuable insofar as it is technological, technical, that is, insofar as it provides access to the market. Otherwise, it is worthless.

J.-P. Lebrun: This brings us back to the question: once we have identified that the founding narrative—that which expresses the foundation, the father, the origin—is in fact nothing more than a fiction, a myth, how can we not allow ourselves to think that all of this has become completely irrelevant?

Ch. Melman: Myth dresses up the foundation—if I may say so—but the foundation itself is not fiction; the foundation is the Real*. And it is this Real that is missing today, that is lacking in our young people. Where is the real? They know reality * only too well, but where is the Real, is there still one? So, as we have seen, they seek it in the realm of the Imaginary, particularly through fantasy, or in the search for physical limits, with all the risks that this entails. But they are looking for the Real, that is to say, everything that resists...

J.-P. Lebrun: Yes, but the foundation was previously identified through the Symbolic. What escaped us was understood through words! I agree

agree that the foundation is the Real, but the interpretation we had of it was always through the Symbolic...

CH. Melman: Absolutely!

J.-p. lebrun: But it is this path to the question of origin that is now at an impasse, since the symbolic dimension has lost its effectiveness... And when we can no longer question our origins, it is traumatic...

CH. Melman: Which explains why it is returning in such a terrifying form, for example in the form of terrorism.

J.-P. Lebrun: Let's talk about terrorism. You have said that the emergence of the figure of the terrorist is the event par excellence that questions us about this new psychic economy. Could you explain what you mean?

CH. Melman: The terrorist is the crudest representation of the Real, of a Real that is no longer dialecticized by the Symbolic. It is trauma in its purest form. If the media are fascinated by the figure of the terrorist, it is obviously because he is the figure of the absolute Master. The absolute Master is the one who decides life and death. And it is through terror, of course, that he imposes himself, without discussion, without remission. And without any consideration for those he deals with, whether they are his friends or his enemies, since death is in any case the price of his recognition.

j.-p. lebrun: So since we are in the Real, there is no longer any pretense*. We are no longer in pretense, we are no longer marked by this trait of the human condition that means we are always out of step, without immediate access to the Real. We are therefore condemned to pretense, and pretense is what protects us... from red blood, if I may take advantage of the homophony of the term as Lacan did...

ch. melman: That's exactly right, and the formula is excellent. That's why terrorism is either completely misunderstood, or we launch into a bunch of digressions that, at best, almost attempt to justify it. But terrorism is neither right nor wrong.

Always the law!

J.-P. Lebrun: When I spoke of the Symbolic, which yesterday allowed us to approach the Real—like the myth that told of the origin—it was above all to emphasize that it was science that unmasked the fictional, the semblance, of these "discourses" such as myths, for example.

Ch. Melman: I wouldn't say fiction exactly, because it's what ensures our reality.

J.-p. lebrun: But the law, for example, has organized kinship and filiation. And contrary to what one might spontaneously believe, this is a fiction, a construction that makes it possible to organize the links between generations, sometimes even independently of biological reality.

CH. Melman: It didn't organize kinship and filiation, it drew conclusions from what already existed. Filiation was established long before the law, and without any reference to it. The family didn't need any code to consider itself perfectly founded and legitimate. From the moment it was developed, the law sought to replace what was a purely symbolic function with a real one. The irony is that, here again, we see how the law gives rise to, if not imposes, some utterly implausible whims. The legislator will end up drafting a family code setting out the rights and duties of each member of the household. This will open the door to complaints by one member of the couple against the other, or by a child against its parents, for

failure to fulfill their duties within the family. This is already happening, by the way.

J.-P. Lebrun: Is there a risk that the law will become too involved in family affairs?

CH. Melman: It doesn't really interfere with it. The law is used to ensure the fulfillment of our new psychic economy. Today, therefore, the law is concerned with guaranteeing certain satisfactions, even if this is to the detriment of the rules that govern our mental and physical functioning, with the result that legal precepts will inevitably become out of step with reality and defective. The law may well legislate to impose equality in the home, but it will come up against insurmountable difficulties. Imagine a homosexual couple of women who have adopted a child. We will have to face the inevitable inequality in this couple, if only because the child will refuse to call both women by the same name, calling one of them mom and the other perhaps dad. In any case, this child will not be able to call both women mom. He cannot have two moms! Will the child be taken to court, accused of introducing favoritism and inequality into the family? Here we can clearly see the pressure that the law is exerting on rules that until now were considered unbreakable.

J.-P. Lebrun: You are saying, in fact, that what makes humans unique is the way they deal with inequality and asymmetry...

Ch. Melman: It is not being able to think outside asymmetry, nor to think of oneself outside it.

J.-P. Lebrun: But in the context of the new psychic economy, we would introduce the hope of being able to do so...

CH. Melman: In any case, under our secular and republican law, the plaintiff is supposed to be detached from any sexual identity. And the law thus seeks to resolve issues concerning sexuality on the basis of the neutrality of the plaintiffs, that is, by rejecting

, on principle, sexual difference. It is one of the major architects of this evolution towards homogenization that we are witnessing. But this cannot possibly continue without major problems, since all we are doing is relegating otherness to a position of hostility, strangeness, outside the boundaries. We are therefore creating situations of war.

J.-P. Lebrun: But is the law responsible for this? Isn't the law already contaminated by the new psychic economy?

CH. Melman: Lawyers proudly declare that the law must follow the evolution of customs. But it is obvious that what lawyers do not know, cannot know, is that the evolution of customs today can be explained as an attempt to resolve legal impasses—a way of saying that we refuse to allow the law to oppose the taste for comfort that drives our societies. Lawyers cannot know this; it is not within their purview.

J.-P. Lebrun: Except that, even so, quite a few magistrates say they feel very uncomfortable. How could it be otherwise when, called upon to deal with this or that family dispute, they are constantly required to rule on conflicts without necessarily having the necessary expertise in the field?

Ch. Melman: They feel uncomfortable because they remember their childhood, their family, and therefore certain issues and certain ways of passing things on. But the following generations will have no memory of this, or at best a literary memory.

Death swept under the rug

J.-p. Lebrun: This new psychic economy, in the way it spreads and reproduces itself, gives me the impression that it behaves, if you will, like Russian dolls. It can only give rise to a "new" new economy, each time

more radical, generation after generation, since it eliminates the question of asymmetry and difference. By producing more and more of the same, it can only transmit an increasingly deadly utopia, in a way!

ch. melman: Especially since we no longer know how to pass on what death is. Yet it is an essential question in all societies. And we no longer know how to pass it on because we no longer know what it is. Not only do we no longer know what it is, but increasingly we consider it to be something accidental.

J.-P. Lebrun: It is no longer an integral part of life, as your comments on a successful exhibition at the beginning of this interview showed...

CH. Melman: It is no longer an integral part of life, as you say, but it has even been foreclosed. For example, what was obvious during the American war in Afghanistan was that it was a war fought by technicians monitoring and adapting a homicidal machine to the needs of the enterprise. Remote-controlled devices, remote-controlled missiles, and unmanned surveillance aircraft are sent into the field, but they also bomb. We can clearly see how the wars of tomorrow will be fought almost entirely by machines. Machines so powerful that the military is sometimes afraid to control them...

J.-P. Lebrun: There is even talk of "zero-death" warfare...

Ch. Melman: It would seem that, with few exceptions, the only American deaths in the conflict in Afghanistan were caused by their own bombs, mistakes made by the machine. This is obviously an unprecedented development, the full effects of which are not yet known. In the West, people no longer want to die for their country. What does this mean in terms of psychological organization, collective ideals, and therefore in terms of relationships with one's group and one's ancestors?

ancestors, and to one's children? We call on mercenaries, but we protect these mercenaries themselves: what a bad effect it would have if we learned that the only ones who died in combat were mercenaries!

J.-P. Lebrun: The part that the subject is willing to sacrifice to the collective is thus increasingly limited...

CH. Melman: The increasingly common form that the collective dimension takes in this situation can be found in associations and, above all, sports teams. And we know that this involves competing, even in a playful way, with an opponent. How, then, can we be surprised by the more or less violent behavior of fans of teams that are competing against each other?

Denial instead of repression

J.-P. Lebrun: I would like to return to another, more theoretical point concerning this psychological process identified by Freud, namely denial or disavowal, or *Verleugnung**. It is interesting to note how, for Freud, this psychological process of denying gender differences—which implies both recognizing them and, at the same time, refusing to take them into account—is normal in children, as long as it does not persist. Logically, children initially want to know nothing about what they perceive as incongruous. Gradually, as they are confronted with reality, they will, in the best case scenario, give up this conviction that denies what they can observe. I wonder whether this psychological process of *Verleugnung* is not tending to persist for longer and longer today and, as a result, to replace repression. And thus to become widespread, insofar as society—for example, through the promotion of egalitarianism—no longer challenges the denial of children who refuse to accept sexual difference...

ch. melman: You are absolutely right. Denial is obviously one of the main ways of bringing into the realm of reality what should be excluded from it. Denial is one of the ways of rejecting gender difference, castration*. In the current situation, it is clear that denial allows us to no longer deny ourselves anything, since we can admit the most contradictory things. We can experience a whole range of passions thanks to this recourse to denial. The problem remains, however, of the fragility of this operation at a time when, due to the growing rejection of the dimension of reality, negation is losing its foundation and its legitimacy. Negation then becomes nothing more than a stylistic device that has lost its power.

J.-P. Lebrun: Have we not found here a way of accounting for a clinical symptom that is now very common and banal, yet unprecedented in history, which consists in parents no longer saying no to their children. They no longer feel authorized to do so...

ch. melman: Indeed. They can no longer say no, simply because, generally speaking, we can no longer say no. There is nothing left in the world that says no. What still says no to us? We have mastered everything, we have dominated everything, we have done everything, we have seen everything, we have explored everything, from the most distant planets to the most hidden parts of the body. We have even shed light on the processes of reproduction. What can still say no to us today? Terrorists, perhaps...

What does denial, Verleugnung*, usually refer to? To that part of the divided subject* that is unmentionable. Unmentionable with good reason, since this part of the subject cannot be speculated upon and does not have to be recognized as such in the realm of reality. It therefore seems legitimate to say: "No, it's not me!" Indeed, it is not "him," since it is an "I" that has no right to be "pre-sentified" in reality.

From now on, what the self simply has to preserve is its presence, its unity, its value, no longer from an ethical point of view, but simply from an aesthetic one. However, from the moment we are faced with the gaze not of a third party, but of another, in a solely dual dimension, we can be fascinated. And aestheticism can perfectly help to highlight a tyrant, an executioner, or a bastard. For such an image is likely to be as seductive, if not more so, than that of the honest man who could previously be held up before the eyes of God. When it comes to defending aestheticism in the eyes of another, all figures are possible, from the brave, devoted girl who suddenly finds herself a movie star to the outright bastard.

Those who admirably cultivated aestheticism were the Nazis. The parades in Nuremberg were aesthetically perfect. Aestheticism allows for the most heinous crimes! Not only can it allow crimes to be committed, but once committed, they can no longer be blamed on their perpetrators, since they were carried out with complete legitimacy.

The craze for cults

J.-P. LEBRUN: This ties in with what you have already referred to as voluntary fascism. Don't we also see this process at work in the craze for cults?

Ch. Melman: Sects offer the masses what our democracies and political organizations can no longer provide but still long for: a master! That is what they offer: a master, a boss, in other words, a guide—a *Führer* in German. Someone who allows you to no longer face doubt, choice, responsibility, who relieves you of the burden of existence. All you have to do is follow and obey. No more free will, you must surrender yourself entirely and completely to the prescriptive commandments. If you take the time to browse through the

various programs offered by cults, you will discover an incredible mishmash. The more implausible, the more comical, the better, it seems. The only thing they have in common is the imperious, imperative, obligatory, and unbreakable nature of what is prescribed within these groups. And it is this feeling of being confronted with a totalitarian-type system that strikes you when you hear the testimony of someone who has "escaped" from a cult.

J.-P. Lebrun: We are clearly dealing with an example of a dual relationship. And a highly appealing image. But what distinguishes a cult from a religion in this respect?

CH. Melman: A cult is an organization, something we don't notice enough, that is not based on belief. One would almost be inclined to add that it is not based on faith either. It appeals to a completely different psychological dimension, that of conviction, which is something entirely different from belief. Belief implies a commitment to an act of faith, whereas here it is a matter of certainty. This is not a Pascalian wager: everyone is assured in advance that their gain, given their stake, will be maximum, perfect. You are promised the jackpot every time!

Such an organization is therefore in no way identifiable, for this reason alone, as a religion. But, moreover, religions derived from monotheism are organized around a father figure who, from the outset, grants remission of sins, knows from the outset that you will be in breach of the Law, and recognizes in you this division, this imperfect side that is inherent in every believer, every faithful person, even those who consider themselves the purest. It is therefore obviously a religion of love that welcomes this imperfection. In sects, this is generally not the case. Sects take religion "further," so to speak; there is a bonus that makes all the difference.

Another feature distinguishes sectarian organizations from religious organizations: the founder of a sect is generally eminently embodied, eminently present in the field of

reality. The life of the group functions on the basis of his knowledge and authority. To use a very subtle distinction made by Lacan about the mechanisms of psychosis, this founder is believed. It is not that we believe in *him*, we believe *him* as such.

Where is education headed?

J.-P. Lebrun: I find an echo of what you say in the fact that the only authority we still accept is charismatic authority. In other words, an authority that can prescribe the best or the worst, that of Hitler or a guru, like that of a very interesting man, but whose words have no guarantee of relevance. This is the only model of authority—apart from that which can be provided by rationality and science—that we recognize today. We can clearly see how teachers, for example, often have to rely on their charisma to compensate for the lack of symbolic authority they once had. They have to charm in order to teach. How do you see teaching from this perspective?

CH. Melman: The question of teaching ties in with what we were saying about transmission. This was conceived from a humanistic perspective; it was about transmitting a style, a spirit, and knowledge. The acquisition of social status was an added bonus, ultimately left to individual initiative. As a result, many students, at least in France, developed a vocation to serve, particularly to serve the state, in the noble and dignified sense of the term. This is no longer the case, or only to a very limited extent.

J.-P. Lebrun: You used the term "social position" *as an added bonus*. That term has been banned today. Lacan's famous remark about analytical therapy, "healing comes as an added bonus," evoking a kind of gratuitousness, seems incongruous today. We want to achieve performance. And if we are looking for something extra, it is extra performance!

CH. Melman: Education does have its origins in religious teaching. And its purpose was to teach respect for moral laws. Secular education was long marked by this origin. But now, to a certain extent, we are only dealing with vocational schools. Insofar as these schools have become what they are, it is quite obvious that students will devalue any teaching that does not contribute directly and immediately to a hypothetical professional training. What use are literature, philosophy, Latin, Greek, history, and geography from this perspective? Certainly not to achieve performance.

J.-P. Lebrun: One could even go so far as to say that the fundamental question for every child, namely to understand their origins, and by extension all origins, is thus eliminated. We are replacing the exploration of this question with an answer by providing a mass of knowledge that literally extinguishes any desire to know. In the Freudian approach, it is the lack of response to the child's desire to know that sustains their questioning...

CH. Melman: And the desire to know has never concerned anything other than sex...

J.-P. Lebrun: That's what a psychoanalyst would say...

CH. Melman: A psychoanalyst, but also any ordinary person. Insofar as sex, stripped of all mystery, is reduced to purely biological, chemical, and technical operations, where there is no longer any room for truth, all that remains is to know everything, to know how it works... and there is nothing left to question.

VI.

J.-p. Lebrun: The expression "new psychic economy" can be abbreviated to NEP, which is reminiscent of the famous "new political economy" launched by Lenin in Russia in the 1920s in an attempt to restore the country after several years of unrest...

Ch. Melman: The new psychic economy, in any case, is most closely related to economic liberalism, which was promoted for a time in Russia by the NEP. Liberalism and free trade have direct subjective effects on those who participate, *willingly or unwillingly*, in their implementation and development. For the progress they bring about consists in transforming a system that made exchange a pact, in particular a pact of solidarity—as Mauss was among the first to point out—into another system dominated by contracts, organized no longer on the basis of solidarity between partners but on their conflicts, their rivalries, their betrayals, their dirty tricks, their cunning, and the talent of their lawyers. Thus, a new economic policy marking the triumph of liberalism leads very directly to a change in the relationship with one's fellow human beings, breaking down

solidarity in favor of competition and aggression. Hence, of course, the bloody, violent, and terrorist reactions we are witnessing from groups of people who are the losers in this new order and who are seeking to reestablish and revive ancestral forms of solidarity.

The discourse of capitalism

J.-P. Lebrun: This could refer to the "discourse of capitalism [21](#)" that Lacan spoke of. Does this NEP have anything to do with this discourse?

ch. melman: Certainly. Identity was once organized on the basis of self-recognition by the Other, that is, by a figure different from the similar, a figure representing a radical otherness that we have already mentioned. The specific traits that allowed for identification necessarily had very marked ethical characteristics: honor, dignity, courage, sacrifice, self-giving. This gave rise to the ideal of the knight. And we can clearly see that, from the 19th century onwards, with the rise of capitalism, this figure came into conflict with that of the financier. For the capitalist, there is no self-recognition — and, by the same token, for anyone involved in this "system" — in the accumulation of capital. For when recognition is only that of one's peers, it is at the same time fragile and susceptible to being revoked. Hegel pointed this out very well when he showed how the "modern" master seeks recognition from his slaves.

What is the validity of such recognition, which is increasingly uncertain because it is never sufficient? Hence the need to constantly increase capital, without any limit to this effort. Recognition according to the "old model" was acquired once and for all: once you had been recognized for a certain number of qualities, your "passage" to a certain status was accepted and definitive. Today, the capitalist subject is constantly chasing this recognition, exposed to all the vagaries of the economy, i.e., at risk of ruin, imprisonment, or, in short, disappearance. We are dealing with two completely different logics: one is based on the assumption of a trait that ensures identity; the other is organized by the incessant quest for signs of an identity that is only valid in the eyes of one's peers, that can only be validated by a mass effect—public and media recognition—and that is never definitively acquired.

J.-P. Lebrun: You have mentioned clinical cases several times during this interview to illustrate the emergence of the new psychic economy. It is clinical practice that forces us to see at work and take into account phenomena that, until now, were at best marginal. Indeed, there is an abundance of requests that are organized differently—let's say outside of transference—and that seem to resonate with a set of so-called societal facts. Logically, this evolution can only accelerate spontaneously, since one of the specific features of this NEP is that it prevents the subject from gaining any perspective on what is happening to them. Do you share this prognosis, which, if so, would be rather worrying?

ch. melman: Until now, we were sensitive to a clinic organized around repression. It was from this that psychoanalysis emerged when, following Freud, we accepted to hear the "noises" made in the field of reality by the sighs of stifled desire. We have moved from this regime to another, where not only is desire no longer repressed, but where the manifestations of jouissance dominate—must dominate. Participation in society and social bonds no longer come through sharing a collective repression, what we call customs and traditions, but instead through joining a kind of permanent party where everyone is invited. Today, it's up to the individual to keep up in the race for pleasure. Condemned to perpetual youth, they are not doing well, because this enjoyment * that is imposed on them is no longer regulated, as we have seen, from an Other place *. Nothing remains to bear witness to its peak and its decline. And the subject feels a certain disarray and suffers from a lack of reference points. This translates, among other things, into fatigue and anxiety. As if they were asking themselves: what do they want from me?

j.-p. lebrun: Because this "economy," as we know, leads to confusion between desire and enjoyment...

CH. Melman: Absolutely! Yet, as we have already said, throughout history, this type of situation has always provoked a backlash, a public call for the "master" to come and regulate enjoyment. What will happen this time?

J.-P. Lebrun: Looking at history, we should be worried. But aren't we now living in a society that is more resistant to this "call to the master" because of the way it works? Isn't democratic participation now considered an intangible given, an untouchable element of the social game?

ch. melman: Untouchable? The displays of mastery that are flourishing in various groups in our societies have a certain fascination...

J.-p. lebrun: You're thinking, for example, of cults again... CH.

melman: Or terrorism!

J.-P. Lebrun: Certainly. However, it is difficult to see how a genuine call for a master, for an authoritarian regime, could suddenly emerge in our modern democracies...

CH. Melman: We saw it in Europe seventy years ago, in Germany, which is not so long ago.

J.-P. Lebrun: That's true. But we might also think that, for the first time, we have protected ourselves from this kind of surprise...

CH. Melman: All we know is that the usual mode of social regulation leads to this. Are there others? We'll see... I would, however, make the following reservation: it is wrong to think that the subject is eager to preserve its singularity. On the contrary, we see them seeking out all forms of collective identification in which they can dissolve themselves. The desire to be taken care of, to entrust the direction of one's existence to religious, cultural, and political systems, is more evident than ever. In my view, democracy, with its ideal of free choice, does not necessarily lead,

from a psychological point of view, to the most satisfying and happiest state. The sheep-like aspirations of our contemporaries are there to prove it...

J.-P. Lebrun: We can interpret this aspiration as you do, or wonder whether it is not simply the result of a difficulty in forming social bonds in a different way than before—through religion, for example. Religion—I am obviously not talking here about faith, but about *religere*, that which allows us to participate in a common culture—has nevertheless played a major role, one that has no equivalent today...

ch. melman: That's an important question. Because, as we know, economic liberalism tends to have the effect of breaking down social ties. Except that, for my part, I don't see any remedy for this situation, any solution to protect ourselves from its effects—except accepting the master's discourse and thus assuming an identity that would be in his image, the same for everyone. I'm not going to dream about the possibility of returning to Eden, a pastoral life of exchanges limited to basic needs in a peaceful world! We have to take into account what psychoanalysis teaches us!

Doing without the father, provided we use him

J.-P. Lebrun: You have said several times in our interviews that the unconscious may no longer be polarized by the sexual. Sometimes you present this emerging development as progress, as something that would allow us to move beyond the current identity between castration * and the impossible, while at other times you present it as an even worse alienation, likely to confront us with disturbing figures, those of a real Other *. Are you ambivalent about this?

ch. melman: This is a crucial question, since it concerns the link with the Real. With castration, we have found a way to connect with this dimension of the Real, that is to say

not to be terrified by it, not to fear its omnipotence, not to refer to it at every moment as a trauma, but rather to reconcile ourselves with it. Once the unconscious is no longer sexual, the Real has nothing more to "tell" us, except to command us, to function in an imperative mode, like a categorical imperative.

J.-P. Lebrun: This ties in with your remark that sexuality digs the place where the subject can take shelter...

Ch. Melman: Otherwise, we find ourselves in a psychotic state, where what emanates from the Real only intervenes as a command. One of the main features of psychosis is precisely this: the literal elements, the signifying elements * that take their place in the Real are no longer correlated with a sexual prohibition, with what can sexualize them. They can therefore no longer return in the form of a support, a revival of sexuality. That is why I was able to speak of an even worse alienation.

J.-P. Lebrun: If the father, in our society, no longer had this function of sexualizing the impossible, if, without the support of patriarchy, he could no longer assume his role of enabling this knot to be tied, if we were to stop using the father, as you suggest, what would happen? Would there be, I insist, any other way out than to let the subject plunge definitively into this new psychic economy?

ch. melman: The invaluable service a father can render to his offspring is indeed to let them know that there is such a thing as the impossible. He makes this clear to them in the realm of reality, starting with the prohibition of incest. And it is this dimension of the impossible, thus perceived, that proves to be the nourishment of desire, that even appears as the condition of desire. So, we could say that the subject is condemned to the symptom, to resign himself to failure, to cultivate the impossible! Lacan's formula, proposing to "do without the Name-of-the-Father on condition of using it," testifies to what could be

a subjective progress in this regard. This would consist, not in celebrating the father as in religion, or in simply wanting to annul him as we do today, but in taking him into account. For it is on the basis of this taking into account—and the establishment of the impossible that it entails—that we would be in a position to "liquidate the transference," as it is crudely put in analytical jargon. This would not mean that, from then on, anything would be permitted, but that we could arrive at a simple, direct recognition of what the laws of language are, purely and simply. Moreover, if we do not take the laws of language into account, if we do not use the Name-of-the-Father, we cannot do without them either...

J.-P. Lebrun: There is no way to do without the Name-of-the-Father, that's for sure, if we haven't used it... In other words, there is no real way around the laws of language?

CH. Melman: Exactly!

A new psychic economy for the analyst?

J.-p. Lebrun: In such a context, isn't the psychoanalyst forced to rethink his intervention?

CH. Melman: The only service that psychoanalysts can provide, now more than ever, is to create this place of refuge, this empty space that allows a subject to organize their speech, which would otherwise be incoherent, and to express what they are suffering. The surprise for the subject is to come and talk on a couch to someone who does not respond and to find that the words they are expressing begin to take shape.

J.-P. Lebrun: This makes it possible to redraw the contours of the subject...

ch. melman: And at the same time give them back their place. So that from now on, when they arrive at the analyst's office, they will often take their keys out of their pocket, thinking that they are going home.

J.-P. Lebrun: You are referring to a subject who would have spontaneously realized that he still had a place to occupy, a potential to fulfill. However, as we have seen time and again, today we also adjust things for patients for whom this possible place as a subject is now only a faint memory, as if it had already been almost erased. Their behavior reflects speech that no longer says anything or speech that can never be acted upon...

ch. melman: Indeed. I can mention here the case, for example, of a young woman, a television presenter, who came to see me. It took her some time to let go of her constant concern to present herself in a pleasant way, as "castration-free," a perfect, well-adjusted, charming woman. This "Moïque" constraint completely blocked the reality of her existence. It took a long time for the mask to suddenly fall away and reveal the painful creature who was unable to express herself. What was expected of her was obviously to convey this smooth, ideal image.

J.-P. Lebrun: You are still dealing with someone who came to see you...

Ch. Melman: There is indeed a mystery. It seems that there is always a place where the subject, as in the case of this young woman, for example, is not entirely alienated. There remains a part of the subject which, although stifled, or perhaps because it is stifled, is suffering. Even there, there is still something, if I may say so, that demands to exist, to become a subject.

J.-P. Lebrun: But at the same time, it cannot, will not submit to the irreducible constraints of existence!

Ch. Melman: Of course. The paradox is that acquired existence seeks to cancel itself out, and non-existent existence seeks to manifest itself. But these are not paradoxes that should surprise us.

J.-p. Lebrun: Ultimately, what we have identified as belonging to the realm of the un —this new un economy psychic —is only relevant

condition of assuming that the organization of collective life can modify the psychic structure of subjects. Does Lacan's formula that "the unconscious is the social" mean, in your opinion, that this is indeed the case?

ch. melman: "The unconscious is the social" means that castration * is never a private matter. Its modalities are always collective. Contrary to what the neurotic imagines, the unconscious is not a singular affair.

J.-P. Lebrun: Indeed, this new psychic economy, that of The "liberal man," as you call him, is consistent with the dominant economic model of the market. But do you see this as an evolution with particularly significant consequences, or a genuine revolution heralding a major anthropological shift? When you refer to the persistence, in your patient, of this something that demands to exist, to become a subject, I tend to understand that this is still the same speaking subject we have always dealt with, even if it has been reshaped by the determinants of the liberal economy. At other times, on the contrary, I get the impression that you are describing the emergence of a mutant. Could you conclude by giving us your thoughts on this?

CH. Melman: What is paradoxical about human desire—I say this again—is that it depends on the rejection of an object. Thus, we regularly observe in children—a trait too often overlooked by pediatricians and child psychologists—that they selectively and stubbornly reject a particular object, always the same one, which then stands out from the objects that could satisfy them. It is this unyielding "anything but that!"—even if it is just refusing to eat a certain vegetable or not wearing a certain item of clothing—that will constitute the fixed point organizing their subjectivity, and it is to this refusal, and not to the diversity of their choices, that their singularity as a subject will be attached. Paradoxically, therefore, the subject

persists in its singular existence only on condition that it lacks its being, since it is this lost object that assumes the permanence of its essence. Freud called this object *das Ding* to contrast it with what in German is called *die Sache*, meaning "the thing" in the most banal sense of the term, and I have already had occasion to point out that Lacan, for his part, wrote it as objet petit a *, in the same way that the mathematician Cantor wrote aleph to designate infinity. The object

"cause of our desire" is therefore not part of our reality, but we must recognize it as situated in the Real.

When we consider the enigmatic question that arises for every subject, "What am I?", we see what the answer must be: ultimately, what constitutes my being is this fundamentally lost object, outside reality, the fruit of being caught up in language, which will be the refractory rock on which the flow of signifiers—words, to put it too simply—will come to rest, while at the same time establishing for the subject its definitive and secret part, since it is unknown to the subject itself.

This is the mechanism that is subverted by the cultural shift introduced by economic liberalism through the encouragement of unbridled hedonism. As a result, it is no longer a psychic economy centered on the lost object and its representatives that is endorsed; on the contrary, it is a psychic economy organized by the presentation of an object that is now accessible and by the fulfillment of enjoyment to its ultimate conclusion.

This new organization is therefore perfectly homogeneous, without this being stated or articulated in relation to the development of the market economy. If you think about it for a moment, you can see that this NEP is simply the ideology of the market economy. This ideology is anonymous, it has no one responsible for it, and that is what is so disconcerting. To be active, it no longer needs a voice, it does not need to refer to an author, nor does it need to be revealed, because it operates in a logical field where nothing is impossible. In other words, reality has become so improbable for each of us

us a dimension so improbable that we can no longer distinguish reality from virtuality. How do we know if we are in the real world or if we are in a representation? This is not a new question, but it has taken on a whole new meaning today, because we no longer have the means to know what is real and what is virtual, given that what underpins, I would say, the field of reality is that it is bounded by the real. However, if this field of reality is no longer bounded by the real, as liberalism proposes, then we can no longer know if we are really here, or even what we are doing here.

This is why I would readily say that the new man has arrived! For his originality, unprecedented in history, lies in his participation in a society whose only identifying feature is supported by this community of enjoyment, that of an object now available to our global village. As a result, it is also a community that shares a lifestyle that no longer tolerates limitations or restrictions. And since the law must now follow the evolution of customs, it will be there to legitimize the most eccentric demands.

What is new, therefore, is that the defining feature is no longer a language, an ancestor, or an ideal—all identities that were organized around the "hole" left by the loss of the object, in other words, around the Real—but rather that borrowed from the now accessible presence of the object of enjoyment. In such a configuration, the "new man" can identify himself with this object, and it is therefore not surprising that he exposes himself, in his private life as well as in the labor market, to being treated, in turn, as an object of enjoyment.

Some might argue that we should welcome this universalization of satisfaction, which is, after all, the only way to bring the world into harmony today. Why not congratulate ourselves on finally giving primacy to this hedonistic subject?

Unfortunately, we must be disillusioned. For the individual thus solicited by the market economy has nothing to do with any real singular existence as a subject. This so-called economy merely appeals to an abstract consumer who must adapt to the offers—which, as we know, are dazzling

— that now subjugate them. And, in this way, by revolving around the available object, the creatures themselves are transformed into objects, becoming nothing more than ectoplasms that, more than ever, are imposed with the feeling of a virtual experience. Since it is not the specific identity of their desire that dictates their choice of object, but rather the media promotion that imposes an object on them, which in turn induces an appetite that can now be identified by the product brand.

The first to recognize the growing number of these new men in circulation were, in fact, advertisers. A growing demand *for aesthetics* has, in effect, influenced the effectiveness of their message and—whether it be for a car, cheese, or an AIDS campaign—validated its sole meaning: it is beautiful, therefore it is good.

Journalists followed advertisers in this movement of recognition—sales figures oblige—and we saw an increase in the number of pages devoted to major brands in daily newspapers, along with those devoted to leisure activities, entertainment, travel, practical advice, etc.

The informative section of these newspapers has declined considerably in comparison with "local" news: readers are only interested in what affects them, either directly or through emotional involvement.

Politicians quickly had to learn to capture voters' attention in other ways, since image now conveys the message. It was therefore up to their communications teams to ensure that all the traits that made up their image were consistent, because the slightest inconsistency invalidates the whole. From this perspective, the nature of the political choices proposed may not seem decisive and may demobilize voters.

made up their image were consistent, because the slightest discrepancy invalidates the whole. From this perspective, the nature of the political choices on offer may not seem decisive and may demobilize voters.

And so we find ourselves in a community organized by extreme individualism and competition between everyone.

Homo faber has thus been replaced by homo fabricated.

As you can see, this new psychic economy is indeed creating a new kind of man! But the question is whether this new man will lead to the demise of the old model, whether this "liberal man," assured of the validity of his enjoyment, will definitively take over from the "speaking" subject—what Lacan called the *parlêtre*—who is always forced to pay the price of his desire. In other words, will the free course of enjoyment prevail over the irreducible torment of desire?

Will that which demands to exist, to become a subject—as in the case of the patient I mentioned—persevere and ultimately find its way, and in so doing, find its voice? Or, on the contrary, will this human being, subject to the laws of language, allow themselves to be definitively drowned in the pursuit of immediate enjoyment? Can such a misunderstanding continue, and perhaps even last? Will the mutant of the NEP have to find something else to sustain themselves, or will they only be able to fulfill themselves through self-destruction?

Can our joyful, polymorphous perversity last? Or will we return to moral order and the stick? Or can we imagine that, having been warned, we will be able to avoid both a return to Freudian neurosis and a headlong rush into generalized perversion? We shall see...

Appendices

Finally, a new form of enjoyment: necroscopy [22](#)

by Charles Melman

We cannot repeat often enough, after Monsieur Homais, that science is truly admirable, even though it has hardly invented any new pleasures. We could even accuse it of having disturbed those that had been acquired up to now. In any case, the stimulation of orifices and the instrumentalization of organs were practiced long before science came along, and we will no doubt have to wait a while longer before DNA manipulation brings us new areas of exquisite pleasure, which we hope will be more practical and hygienic, so that we can usher in a better era. The plight of our literature, divided between the fundamentalist cult of sex and its radical eradication, now that it realizes that almost everything has been said and done, probably stems from this: we need new thrills. We can therefore be proud to draw attention to the birth of a new form of perversion that is devastating from the outset and in no way elitist. Its success is due to a performance that is certainly more technical than scientific, but, as we shall see, this does not diminish its merit.

An anatomy assistant at the Heidelberg Medical School has found a way to replace the water in cadaver cells, while they are still fresh, with epoxy resins using an acetone bath. This results in a permanent halt to the decomposition process and a rigidity of the body that can be fixed in poses reminiscent of the living: the runner, the thinker, the gymnast, chess players, etc.

The corpse is therefore often presented standing or sitting, skinned so that the muscles and vascular and nervous pathways are visible, with a temporal trepanation that reveals part of the brain, a partial dissection of the cheek that shows the insertions of the masseters, the attachment of the facial muscles in an expression made all the more inspired by glass eyes that simulate a gaze; the naked genitals are in perfect shape, albeit flaccid. One of the corpses carries its own skin elegantly stretched out on its arm, as if it were a garment it had just taken off. Harmoniously arranged, the ensemble evokes statuary that is no longer imitative but seems to have come from the hand of God himself. In the guest book of the traveling exhibition, where people jostle to admire these creations, there are moving comments on the perfection of the divine work that has finally been revealed.

A soft light filters through panels whose plates enclose delicate, delicately colored slats of the severed body. The stained-glass windows give the gathering an architecture that inspires piety and contemplation, even in front of the expanded bodies—whose muscles, like corollas, stand out gracefully in space from their insertions—or the bodies in drawers, as predicted by the genius of Dali. But would he have appreciated the flayed skin of this beautiful woman, her swollen nipples and her belly open to reveal a uterus swollen with a fetus?

Dr. Gunther von Hagens, his college professor, writes in the catalog that when the "artist" has an idea in his head, he has no other thoughts, which seems to suggest that he is already somewhat plastinated during his lifetime. This is a perfectly reasonable assumption, given that he has already donated his body to be plastinated, promising his admirers who wish to follow him eternal and flattering promiscuity. The criticism that would easily come to mind concerns the exhibition catalog: a voluminous compendium of articles by German professors from all disciplines

but equal in seriousness and too obviously designed to ward off any reservations or suspicions. Why should "anatomical art" arouse them when the Enlightenment, the necessary democratization of knowledge, and aesthetic pleasure are all present to make the exhibition of corpses honorable, and in a way that does not reserve the pleasure of snooping around in tissues for morticians, in rather damp and disgusting conditions, as we know? One can guess that free mornings for children are not far off, which will spare them from having to secretly leaf through dictionaries. The weight of the catalog seems deliberately designed to seal the lips of critics. What is there to remember from their painful babbling?

The dignity of an object

The fact is that a line has been crossed with the use of corpses for aesthetic purposes, in short, for our enjoyment. Until now, the human race has shared a common trait: the duty of burial, that place of silence and darkness where the memory of the dead is preserved, pure, finally relieved of the reality of the body. If they are thus removed from the realm of the living, it is because they take their place in the lineage that sustains the living. And the desecration of graves has always been experienced as the most direct attack on their right to exist.

Carcasses left to rot for predators are the ultimate insult, a way of castrating those who can no longer defend themselves after death, except by waiting for revenge from their children.

Of course, plastification protects against such a fate, allowing magnified bodies an almost marble-like eternity, turning the somatic envelope into its own burial place. Economical and hygienic, isn't it? One imagines that descendants who are willing to pay the price—because the plasticization of the entire body requires more than a thousand hours of delicate work, and it is hard to imagine them haggling over keeping only a part of it, even if it was cherished—could

keep the aesthetically arranged corpse of their favorite ancestor in a corner of their living room. Any moral objection to the process would thus be reduced to the destination of the corpse, which is utilitarian and aesthetic, introducing into the exchange circuit the instance reserved for the most private use imaginable.

Admittedly, so-called underdeveloped countries have long engaged in the practice of selling the sacred figurines of their deities, since there are dollars to be made. And it is touching to see that yesterday's masters are now perfectly willing to elevate their own ancestors to the dignity of exchangeable objects. One can only rejoice at the metaphysical subtleties engendered by the process. For if the ideal of the members of the species has always been to be recognized as human beings, is it not dignity as an object—now indestructible and of a beauty that escapes fashion—that they seek to perpetuate?

Let's drop the sophistry. The corpses on display are not old, but beautiful, young bodies struck by disease—the tumor is duly displayed

— or by accident. Are they still perfectly cadavers, or are they material, ready-made objects made available to the artist, like toilet bowls, bicycle handlebars, or forks, and why did it take so long to use them? The question would remain unanswered if it weren't for the devastating success of the exhibition - 780,000 visitors in Mannheim, a city in the Lânder region where the doors had to be left open 24 hours a day to satisfy demand, two and a half million in Tokyo, a huge success in Vienna (Austria) - did not indicate that its appeal is certainly less due to a desire to educate or celebrate beauty than to the perversion it invents.

Necrophilia is rare, complicated to satisfy, and rather repulsive. Whereas the technical process developed by our "artist" allows, with complete impunity and for the best of reasons,

in a spirit of conviviality, a scopic enjoyment of death, crossing a line that was yesterday both forbidden and impossible.

Authenticity, in this case, is the best selling point. The exhibition is not a display of representations, but a presentation of the object itself: it is the limit of what can be offered to the eye. Even when exhibited, sex is never more than a representation of the psychic instance—the phallus, in Lacan's conceptualization—which it evokes but which eludes all grasp. The corpse, on the other hand, is its ultimate and finally manipulable presentification, made possible here by the respectability and alibis of the procedure. Thanatos has never been anything but the limit of Eros, the real to which the latter inevitably leads and which, at the end of the repetition of the desirable representations it arranges, offers the only "authentic" body that exposes itself to seizure, at the moment when this fails. Unable to enjoy the authenticity of sex, how can we not be fascinated by the reality of death, which is its crowning glory?

Those who have faced death

But our terrain is proving to be tricky, to say the least. For the representatives of the funeral authority find themselves authentic, true, real (and no longer mere semblances of men) in a community of which it has become the ideal, under the aegis of the swastika, for example. Hegel's definition of the master: he who has faced death; in other words, death legitimizes him by becoming his reference point. And we could recall Hitler's tantrums when, in 1944, this ideal had become a little too real, and he witnessed the rout of heroes who began to prefer life.

The love for the father regularly wavered between the duty to continue his lineage—at the risk of being nothing more than a mediocre imitation—and that of dying for him, the only way to fulfill himself in the authenticity of the ideal. The current Berlin exhibition of plasticized corpses gives the curious French visitor a strange feeling of déjà vu. Not only because their posture seeks to glorify the eternal beauty

in the manner of Arno Breker, in bodybuilding. But also because they express the desire to seduce the gaze of the Other, beyond life itself; it is this desire that is perpetuated here.

It comes as no surprise to learn from his biography that Gunther Von Hagens was a defector from the GDR in the 1970s. Perfect control of the body is an old Prussian ideal

—cf. Dr. Schreber, father of the President—which he seems to have carried with him. And this diversion seems unfortunate, as his works would have been remarkable in their own right, brightening up the squares and parks of East Germany's barracks towns.

The traveling exhibition that now brings them together will naturally attract the uninitiated, offering them, for the price of a ticket, the thrill of risk-free desecration and the satisfaction of a natural childlike curiosity. What is there in the body? If it is reduced to its machinery, it is of course long dead before it is suitable for Dr. von Hagens' *post-mortem* gymnastics.

Introduction to the New Psychic Economy [23](#)

by Charles Melman

Ridebis, et licet rideas.

Pliny the Younger, Letter to Tacitus, Book 1, No. 6

We are in the process of leaving behind a culture whose religion forces its adherents to repress their desires and become neurotic, in favor of one that proclaims the right to free expression and complete satisfaction.

Such a radical change brings with it a rapid devaluation of the values handed down by moral and political tradition. The petrified figures of authority and knowledge seem to have disintegrated in such a way that it is possible to think that the change we are experiencing is being driven by the spontaneous combination of individual wills, without any reference

to an established program. A certain anxiety is perceptible at the idea that this could indeed be the case. The absence of a divine intelligence, a political will or even a class interest to drive the process makes it difficult to understand. And the decisions of public authorities, and even public action, become uncertain when they have to try to reconcile the singularity of so many monads.

It is the sharing of a common passion that alone manages to bring them together today in communities reduced to the status of clubs, chosen at random: bikers, environmentalists, hunters, patriots, homosexuals, etc.; and the art of governing has become that of making the opposing interests of pressure groups compatible with each other and with Brussels directives.

Young people love this change, which, incidentally, seems to be theirs. Did they not have to turn away from the authorities and established knowledge in order to create the new economy that we see triumphing and heralding the Eldorado?

Let us remember that this change rewards invention and creativity, restoring the primacy of intelligence over capital and reminding us that intelligence is the true source of wealth.

Freud argued that "the discontents of civilization" were linked to the excessive sexual repression it demanded. Is happiness now at our doorstep, in a society that has finally been cured of its symptom?

Psychoanalysis deserves to be examined to see whether a promise that has so far been utopian could finally be fulfilled.

Towards the creation of a universal language?

It is to be hoped that linguists will pay some attention to the language used for international exchanges currently developing on the Web. The predicted globalization will not happen without its already noticeable and predictable peculiarities. These could

prove decisive for our psychological future if it were to become the dominant language.

We can roughly distinguish three types of texts appearing on screens today: "literary" texts written according to the grammatical rules of a conventional language, commercial writings in English, and finally those that concern us here, which are based on American English and are currently being developed. What kind are they?

At first glance, this language may seem ideal, unreservedly and unquestionably suited to communication. Addressing an unknown recipient automatically clears away any confusion caused by references to origins or subjectivity. In this case, it is only interest in a common object that provides the minimum identity and agreement necessary for mutual recognition. This has not always been the case. In their time, the South American Indians were rather surprised by the nature of the objects that interested their conquerors. Their standard of value was more ideal, concerning all the qualities required by the status of man. We will not dwell on the progress that has been made in assimilating this status to that of a consumer. But we will remember above all that the conventional use of language has more references and consequences than it appears to communication theorists. Thus, in defiance of plausibility and social reality, they reject the term "mother tongue," based on the absence of the relevant linguistic sign that would distinguish it.

We will even push their anger further by pointing to the intrusions of psychoanalysis and asking them to define what they mean by "dead language." Is it because of the supposed gray hair of the specialists who practice it, or because it is no longer a vehicle for romantic exchanges, in short, because it no longer serves to f... ?

The gift that a mother tongue gives to its children is to bring them together in the celebration of a common origin and also to...

separated by a promising otherness of sexual pacification; at least when one of the partners does not feel too disadvantaged in the division of roles to prefer conflict. It also includes, within itself, an otherness that it protects because it is life-giving, quite different from the strangeness that lies beyond a border. The rule of exchanging women still perpetuates the idea that marriage is a victory over the representative of a foreign community who, when placed at the service of sex, reproduction, or even work, thus becomes an "other." It is likely that some of the "contempt" attached to women is linked to this imaginary betrayal of their filiation. But the surprise revealed by the most common observation of married life is that today the sex of the person who occupies the other position is no longer so clearly decided; in short, we have imperceptibly moved on, no doubt in the spirit of progress, to the exchange of men. The myth of abduction, whereby heroic ancestors went to kidnap women, who were therefore strangers, from a neighbouring population, testifies to our mental weakness; it persists in the perpetuation of clan warfare, which readily makes headlines in modern married life.

The inequality established by language gives one (or one of them) a position of master and the other the investment of seduction that makes them desirable. This object, which can also be assumed by the man, makes him, in the couple formed with the capitalist master, suitable for exploitation. Peace between partners undoubtedly depends largely on the satisfaction the master derives from maintaining his position.

In any case, the partners separated from this unique community established by the use of language recognize each other through the mutual deployment of metaphors and metonymies; analogous to plumage, this song—since it also

be reduced to verbal stereotypes as coded as birdsong—allows identity to be signaled beyond difference...

Significantly, this identity is based not on a sharing of being but of a beginning; the infinite play of metaphors and metonymies, through which they refer only to themselves, clearly signifies the cutting off and removal from view of the being they make us desire so infinitely.

In the animal kingdom, humans stand out by exhibiting this bizarre condition that consists of constantly seeking reassurance of the validity and legitimacy of their own existence and that of their objects. The clinical forms of this condition are often cruel to the species, or to women.

Can the inter-idiomatic neo-language currently forming on the web bring us some kind of truce? It clearly rejects the community of origin in favor of a shared passion for the same object. This object is explicitly intramundane and retroactively justifies a purely denotative use of the signifier.

The code of an exact language would thus be in the process of finally taking shape if the creativity of the speakers and their approximate knowledge of American grammar did not combine to forge an original, fluctuating language, free from syntax and spelling, constrained only by the desire to convey meaning. There is therefore no regulatory authority between writers, whose right to comfortable expression takes precedence over knowledge and rules. The devaluation of acquired writing skills in relation to the apparent innateness of speech democratically abolishes the dimension of error but also, paradoxically, that of the slip of the tongue. Does this type of writing still presuppose an unconscious, given that social complicity encourages the free expression of fantasies?

"Son pair ne l'aimait poing" (His peer didn't like him), an example recently highlighted by the press in a Brevet dictation, can only be considered poetic creation if it refers to a code, one that is in fact

found on the internet. Such an original spelling could have seemed poetic, creating a new literary form—a curious derivative of Joyce, for example—if the rejection of a frame of reference did not force it to take on a fixed meaning, in this case that of the object of shared passion.

In reality, this fixed point is meaningless. For the tradition of hermeneutics would remind us, if necessary, that interpretation is at the root of the deciphering of any text, whose intrinsic property is precisely to conceal the object that would bring the quest for meaning to an end. The fact that it is placed here at the forefront, based on a social consensus that considers it good to enjoy, is a significant development.

The single thought, too easily denounced, owes its univocality to that of this object, whose exhibition stops the diversity of interpretations of what could have been the best approach. But it also owes it to renounce the dimension of truth, since this only existed in the failure of understanding, in the "That's not it" that it opposes to it. Admittedly, the object placed on the market is artificial, but its ethics are to present itself as the vehicle of ultimate and true enjoyment, the kind that shuts you up without remission, closing you off to all surprise.

Is this a perversion? It would be if it were a transgression. In our case, the social consensus inaugurates a satisfaction that could be both fulfilled and cleansed of sin, especially since it places the partners on an equal footing around a single, secularized object, so to speak, exempt from being stolen from God since it is purely an effect of art. Parity is therefore ensured between the partners, quite unlike the chiasm that previously divided a couple engaged in the capture of an object that was different for each of them and desperately needed legitimacy, when transgression did not reinforce it with a touch of eroticism.

But what subject does this artificial object now come to delight? Does the private nature of the coding we refer to on the Web singularize a subject or does it directly express the need of an organism?

A subject can only exist if its uniqueness can be recognized. In this case, the actors enjoy blending into the anonymity of a collective body whose voice becomes their own. This voice is obviously all the more powerful as more and more threads converge on it—a Schréberian concept—but it nevertheless seeks another ear capable of reflecting back to it the perception of its particularity. Is the wish expressed on this occasion a demand or a desire? Let us recall that for Lacan, while need suffers from not having an object that universally responds to the demand, desire can tolerate such an object (which he calls *a*) but only insofar as it eludes grasp. In the case that concerns us here, neither the demand—which is ultimately a demand for nothing—nor desire

—whose physiology is to avoid encountering the object—seem to be involved. The original mechanism of satisfaction at stake is more akin to that of a dependence on an object belonging to the realm of reality, whose economy is regulated by alternating presence and absence. In this sense, drug addiction appears to be at the forefront of a cultural process that is becoming widespread.

Such progress does not seem to suffer from being reduced to an archaic stage of psychological development, which Winnicott noted as permanent in children, marked by this alternating relationship with an object he called transitional; this qualifier specifies the time before its definitive loss immortalizes it in a brilliance whose substitutes in reality will be nothing more than a reflection.

We can appreciate the possible resurgence of this stage when tension in the organism is resolved by the demand, through the establishment of an object capable of universally satisfying it, and, for desire, through its appropriation. We could thus call the new relationship established by the organism with an object whose alternating presence/absence is its value a quasi-instinctual appetite.

Socialized surplus enjoyment, then, signaling the triumph of collective hedonism over the symptom. Its benefit is not insignificant, considering that sex—inevitably represented in our imagination by the male sex—is among the available items and that the system finally allows for the equality of partners, regardless of their anatomy, through the same tension for the same object. The alternation of positions in the dominant/dominated relationship, mimicking in reality that of presence/absence, makes parity the political watchword of the future.

This approach to language in the making, which is still succinct and lacking in examples, might seem forced if the cultural changes currently underway did not argue for a wider extension of its effects. It is trivial to note the striking disinvestment in literary studies and spelling. We have even seen ministerial authorities recommend adapting the latter to the naive spellings spontaneously proposed. It is predictable that a culture based on reference to texts would see this development as a twilight. But it should be remembered that their impact in the fields of religion and politics has given the flowers of rhetoric a funereal destination. It is to some of them that psychoanalysis owes its expansion after the First World War.

We have also noted the business-like treatment of romantic relationships. It is certainly true that women in industrialized countries have long believed that they must present themselves as manufactured products, whose luxury qualifies the status of their partner. But, if we are to believe the media, it is now the harsh, crude, and accounting

language of commerce has replaced the poetry of romantic dialogue. The law of supply and demand, the quality/price ratio of a partner, and their return in case of dissatisfaction do not seem to bother noble ladies and troubadours.

The contract no longer often bothers with the constraints associated with the couple's place in a lineage. Thus, it is easy for the judge in matrimonial cases, and tomorrow the guardian of the children, to act as the required third party.

The modern difficulty of the couple, whose contract has become commercial and legal and has imaginatively replaced the symbolism of exchange, is to ensure the greater enjoyment promised by the market. But the alternation between presence and absence implies a periodic drop in tension that can easily be experienced as a loss.

The genius of industry has been to manufacture instruments designed to alleviate the pain of work; today, it is to produce those capable of ensuring complete enjoyment, as long as they abolish our limits. We thus come to enjoy the body of our car more than the means of transport it represents.

Is our new society one of widespread perversion? Atheistic and therefore benign perversion, we might say, since it dispenses with the need to question or require God. But it leaves open the question of whether the permanent party to which we are invited is capable of curing us of the symptom.

Glossary 24

aufhebung: For Hegel, the process that animates the real and the rational—being and thought—follows a threefold rhythm: thesis or affirmation, antithesis or negation, and synthesis or negation of negation. It is the latter that constitutes the moment of *Y Aufhebung* ("transcendence-preservation").

other: Lacan very quickly wrote Other – Other with a capital letter – to distinguish it from the partner. It is therefore a place, specifically the place of language, located beyond anyone and where that which is prior to the subject and yet determines it is situated. It is the mother who acts as the first Other for the subject, which means that it is she who makes present to the child this scene where his subjectivity will be constructed by words external to himself before he reappropriates them. The mother therefore lends her body to be for the child this place of the Other, which is also the place of language, the place of signifiers.

borderline: See borderline state

castration: Freud identified the existence of anxiety linked to the threat of castration in men and the absence of a penis in women. From the outset, the aim was to identify the subjective, mainly unconscious, consequences of taking this possible lack into account. Lacan, for his part, demonstrated that these were in fact only the consequences of the subject's submission to the laws of language and speech. Throughout his work, he shows and demonstrates that being able to speak requires the existence of a lack, just as the game of push-and-pull or teasing presupposes an empty box. Castration has thus become synonymous with the lack of being implied by each subject's engagement with language. And it is this articulation that led Lacan to differentiate castration from frustration and deprivation. He

These are three forms of deprivation: castration, as symbolic deprivation; frustration, as imaginary deprivation; and deprivation, as real deprivation. Confronting castration anxiety (confronting the father) is normalizing for the subject, as it forces them to abandon their position of imaginary omnipotence as a child (they were the phallus—see Phallus

- for the mother). But to do so, he must first overcome it by accepting it, that is, by consenting to his desire being organized by a lack that is no longer supported by the paternal ideal.

Markov chain: In the text Lacan included in the introduction to his *Écrits* (Seuil, 1966), devoted to a commentary on Edgar Poe's "The Purloined Letter," reference is made to Markov, a Russian mathematician (1856-1922) who specialized in number theory and probability. Markov chains refer to the laws that organize sequences that are apparently purely random. Thus, when we write a succession of four signs, for example "+ + - +" or

"+ - + +" or "+++ -," their order appears to be purely random and therefore not subject to any law. However, grouping them into segments of three produces homogeneous ternary sequences.

"+ + +," symmetrical "+ - +" or asymmetrical "+ + -," and simply by grouping them into triplets, patterns can emerge from what appeared to be purely random. For example, after a homogeneous triplet "+++," you can have an asymmetrical triplet but not a symmetrical triplet. If you write "+++" and want to continue, you can either add a "-" and your sequence becomes "+++ -," in which case the last ternary is asymmetrical, or you can add a "+," and you get "++++," in which case your last ternary is homogeneous. It can therefore be seen, from this grouping alone, that it is impossible to produce a symmetrical ternary after a homogeneous ternary. In other words, simply by grouping the

signs in threes, a proto-law is immediately established, a matrix of the Law (see Law) in the psychoanalytic sense of the term.

construction: Elaboration concerning the subject's history made by the psychoanalyst in order to recover what the subject has forgotten, cannot remember, and which communication would act on in the treatment in parallel with interpretation. It was in a text at the end of his work that Freud showed the importance for the analyst of proposing constructions to certain patients. This concept raises the question of the active role that the analyst must play in the work of analysis, its possible necessity and its limits.

discourse: In psychoanalysis, this is neither language nor speech. Lacan used this term to refer to the type of relationships that subjects can have with each other depending on the arrangement that organizes the four terms—S barré, SI, S2, and

- which implies the "taking" of subjects into language. These four terms are: the battery of signifiers (words to put it too quickly) known as S2, one (or more) master signifiers SI (which singularly organized the subject, the words that were decisive for him), the subject marked by language and which is elusive (it constantly "runs away" since it is only the "product" of the chain of signifiers) called S barré, and the "object a," the remainder of the signifying operation, which always escapes words.

Depending on the precedence of one or other of these terms, thus placed in the position of agent, and therefore in the position of organizer, there will be four different types of social bond: the master discourse (where it is IF, and therefore the master signifier, that commands), the academic discourse (where it is S2, and therefore knowledge, that commands), the hysterical discourse (where it is S barré, and therefore the subject, that commands) and the analytical discourse (where it is the object a that commands). Only once in his work (in a lecture in Milan on psychoanalytic discourse) did Lacan mention a fifth discourse, the discourse of capitalism, where it is

appearance, the subject is in control, but the consequences of this organization mean that there is no longer any real social bond.

Division of the subject, subjective division: Being "subjected" to language means that the subject does not have predetermined behavior at their disposal, unlike animals. The loss implied by being "caught" in language (see "castration" above) creates an irreducible uncertainty for the subject regarding their desire. They are condemned to seek it without ever being able to find it absolutely. Lacan described this effect of language as the "division of the subject," dividing the subject between what they say and the act of saying, between the statement and the utterance.

borderline: This is a nosographic entity that is ambiguous and includes behavioral disorders that are more significant than those classified as neurosis but do not fall under psychosis. Subjects with borderline personality disorder exhibit intolerance to frustration, inner insecurity, hypersensitivity to criticism, and feelings of emptiness and boredom. These patients act out very easily to resolve their inner tensions, which leads to unstable, sometimes even self-destructive, professional or emotional behavior. More and more patients today present this picture and are therefore diagnosed as such, which leaves open questions about the structure of the subject (neurosis or psychosis), the therapeutic prescription, and the link between these pathologies and our social functioning.

Fantasy: For Freud, fantasy(ies) refers to a scenario that we imagine, involving one or more characters and which depicts a desire in a more or less disguised form. Fantasies thus range from conscious daydreams that are easily accessible to us to unconscious representations that organize our psychic reality. In this sense, the term "fantasy" covers as well as and the expression the common expression and the and the cure

can bring to light. Lacan showed the connection between fantasy and "grasping" in language. He first emphasized—following Freud—the essentially linguistic nature of fantasy (it is always a sentence that comes to express a fantasy) , for " aller" (to go), , then , and finally , introducing the notion of "fundamental fantasy." This corresponds to the way in which the subject responds to what they assume the first others expect of them. For example, the Other (see above) wants to devour me and expects me to feed them. As such, the "fundamental fantasy" will constitute, for the subject, the frame of the window through which they perceive the world. This frame will determine their greater or lesser capacity for change. It is this fundamental fantasy that analytical treatment is supposed to not modify—because what was established when the subject came into the world cannot change—but rather relativize, make less consistent.

frustration: See Castration

Collective hysteria: Neurotic behavior of a hysterical nature that spreads to a group of individuals as if under the influence of an epidemic.

ego ideal: See Imaginary

ego ideal: See RSI

phallic instance: The term phallic instance is used to emphasize the organizing character of the symbolic phallus (see below) for subjectivity, as if it were an institution. It is Lacan who gives the phallus its conceptual value in psychoanalysis. He eventually came to think of the phallus in terms of phallic function, which applies to both men and women, albeit differently. This concept is important in Lacan's work, where the phallus symbol appears as the mark of what men and women owe to language.

jouissance: When used by psychoanalysts, this term should not be understood in its usual sense,

although it is not entirely detached from it. Commonly, the term *jouir* refers to sexual *jouissance*, and as such clearly implies that it is related to pleasure. But at the same time, *jouissance* is beyond pleasure. Lacan also indicated that pleasure was a way of protecting oneself from *jouissance*. In the same way that Freud indicated that there was a

"beyond the pleasure principle." Thus, drinking a fine wine can be described as pleasure, but alcoholism carries the subject toward *jouissance*, of which he will be the slave. By extension, the word can be used to refer to the very functioning of a subject as he tirelessly repeats a particular behavior without knowing what compels him to remain—like a river—in the bed of this *jouissance*.

other *jouissance* - phallic *jouissance*: Distinction introduced by Lacan based on the fact that humans "inhabit" language. Indeed, as Lacan demonstrates, Freud's discovery—the existence of the unconscious—is merely a consequence of the fact that we speak and that we are the only animals to do so. "Inhabiting" language therefore implies experiencing a different mode of *jouissance* than that which we might assume animals experience, a specific mode that he calls linguistic or phallic *jouissance* because it subjects the subject to the recognition of an organizing authority, the Phallus. Referring to the Phallus for both sexes in no way reduces linguistic *jouissance* to that of the male. Indeed, Lacan identifies another *jouissance*, feminine *jouissance*, which is additional to phallic *jouissance*, which he calls the *jouissance* of *PAutre*. These are the terms Lacan uses to designate differently—and, in doing so, more accurately—on the one hand, the masculine specificity of referring entirely to the Phallus, and on the other, the feminine particularity of not referring entirely to it, of not being "not-all" confined to it. Thus, for Lacan, both sexes refer to a single libido—in this he agrees with Freud—the so-called phallic libido, but differently: a

man is "all" phallic, while a woman is "not-all" phallic.

Law: The term "law" in psychoanalysis does not refer to written law, let alone rules and regulations. By Law, we must understand what exists as Law beyond written laws and which, from the point of view of psychoanalysis, designates the prohibition of incest insofar as it organizes all human societies and insofar as its necessity can be read as articulated with the loss that will be imposed by the "taking" of the subject into language (see Castration above).

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t

metaphor - metonymy: In common usage, figures of speech that refer to: for metaphor, the substitution of one word for another, creating a new meaning—referring to King Richard as a lion—and, for metonymy, the substitution of one word for another that is related to it, allowing one to refer to a part for the whole, a content for a container, etc. - a sail for a boat, a cup for the liquid it contains, etc. Lacan subverted this common usage to make these two "mechanisms" the very processes of the organization of the signifier (see Signifier) in the unconscious. Thus, metaphor and metonymy will coincide with the processes that Freud had identified as being at work in the elaboration of dreams, namely displacement and condensation. More generally, Lacan will use the concept of "paternal metaphor" to account for the first signifying substitution, that of the mother by the father. This will be his way of reading Freud's Oedipus complex structurally. Indeed, it is no longer so much a question of insisting on the child's initial interest in the mother and on the rivalry with the father who "owns" the mother; for Lacan, it is a question of identifying that the importance of the Oedipal scenario lies in

the fact that, for the first time, another (the father) comes to replace the first other (the mother) with whom the child had to deal. And this first substitution is like a model of the possibility of generalized substitution that constitutes our capacity for language. Lacan, on the other hand, will describe desire as metonymic in order to account for the permanent substitution of objects that organizes it. The loss implied by language (see Castration above) means that no object can fill this void and that the desire caused by it can only be sustained in the desperate search for objects that are always inadequate.

Ideal ego and ego ideal: Two psychic instances named as such by Freud without always distinguishing them conceptually. Lacan refers to the ideal ego as an image that attracts the subject toward an ideal and thus becomes the support for its identification; in this sense, this psychic instance belongs to the imaginary register. On the other hand, the ego ideal, constituted by one or another trait that also attracts the subject towards an ideal, is a symbolic instance that refers to a moral or ethical value. An example of an ideal self is a charismatic figure during adolescence; an example of an ego ideal is a virtue for which the subject will sacrifice some of their immediate interests.

Borromean knot: A mathematical object derived from topology and used by Lacan from 1972 onwards to show the articulation of the three registers of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. The Borromean knot is characterized by the intertwining of three "rings" or "rounds of string" such that the breaking of one causes the unlinking of all three. It was also the figure inscribed on the coat of arms of the Borromeo family, which thus sealed its indissoluble friendship with two other great Italian families.

object: In psychoanalysis, the term "object" refers first and foremost to anything that is targeted and/or invested by the subject in order to establish a link with the outside world, whether it be an object in the literal sense

the usual sense of the term or another subject. Hence, the term "object relation" is used to refer to the fantasmatic modalities that organize a subject's relationship with the outside world. More precisely, psychoanalytic conceptualization has also referred more specifically to certain types of objects: good and bad objects (Melanie Klein, 1934), transitional objects (Donald Woods Winnicott, 1951), and the object a (Jacques Lacan, 1960).

object a: Strictly speaking, this is Lacan's "invention," according to his own terms. The object a is the object that causes desire. Unrepresentable as such, its "loss" is implied by speech but weighs heavily on the entire signifying chain, thereby giving the subject its "consistency"—a paradoxical consistency since it is sustained only by this loss.

phallus: In psychoanalysis, the phallus should not be confused with the penis. The latter is the anatomical organ of the male, while the former is primarily the symbol of this organ when erect. It is in this capacity as the vehicle of the vital flow that the phallus has become a symbol of libido for both sexes. Freud did not sufficiently distinguish between the penis and the phallus. It was Lacan who gave the concept of the phallus its central place in psychoanalytic theory. For Lacan, the phallus is a signifier, but a particular signifier, since it designates all the effects of the signifier on the subject, and more specifically the loss associated with the acquisition of sexuality in language. Thus, the phallus functions as the symbol of "the whole," but thinking "the whole" is already far removed from the reality of "the whole." Lacan often refers to the symbolic Phallus—designated by a capital letter—as the signifier that names "all," but which in the same movement is already the sign of the loss of this "all"; he will call the imaginary phallus—written with a lowercase letter and always preceded by the sign "minus"—this "all" after which the subject always runs but without ever being able to attain it.

plus-de-jour: A neologism proposed by Lacan to designate, by homology with Marxist surplus value, the jouissance after which human desire runs without ever being able to attain it.

privation: See Castration

sexual intercourse: We are familiar with Lacan's famous statement that "there is no sexual intercourse." What he meant by this is that, because they are "caught" in language, men and women never completely meet, there is always a remainder—as when one divides one hundred by three—and that, of course, the existence of this remainder—which is irreducible—makes any hope of complementarity between the sexes impossible. Furthermore, the relationship to this remainder is not the same for both sexes: men are "wholly" phallic and women are "not wholly" (cf. *Jouissance Autre*). As a result, what a woman expects from a man is not what a man expects from a woman. The relevance of this aphorism certainly supports the observation that difficulties in married life are permanent.

real - symbolic - imaginary: These are the three dimensions identified by Lacan as constituting human psychic life. It can be argued that, in the animal world, two of these registers - the Imaginary and the Real

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- are already at work, but that the Symbolic is only fully realized in the world of talking animals, i.e., humans.

The Symbolic therefore refers to the way in which our world is organized by language and its laws (the discontinuity of the chain of signifiers, the substitution of signifiers through metaphor and metonymy, the irreducible loss implied by language, castration). These are all features that impose constraints on human functioning while at the same time giving it access to the possibility of speech. Lacan insists at the beginning of

his work that the introduction of the Symbolic allows access to the human world and that this register prevails over the other two. Subsequently, however, he will show that the three registers can be knotted together without the need to postulate the precedence of one of the three. This will be the moment when he introduces the Borromean knot (see above). The dimension of the Imaginary, in Lacan, goes far beyond its common meaning. It refers to the way in which the subject is constituted from the image of his or her fellow human beings. It is therefore the register of deception, of the dual relationship, of aggression, in a word, of the ego in the Freudian sense of the term. The dimension of the Real, for Lacan, refers to what the intervention of the Symbolic—the fact that we speak—makes irreducibly inaccessible to the subject. The Real should therefore not be confused with reality. A door, for example, can be considered in its symbolic dimension (the word door), in its imaginary dimension (the drawing of the door), or in its real dimension (the door you bump into). The first two registers refer to the reality of the door, the third to its

"real" dimension, which escapes reality.

primordial repression: Freud postulated, in order to account for repression, the existence of an initial repression, a very first repression that would establish the potentiality of the psychic apparatus. This was already a way of talking about this lack, this distance, implied by the act of speaking, which Lacan conceptualized as symbolic castration supported by the Phallus (see Castration and Phallus).

Semblant: For Lacan, the category of Semblant does not refer to false pretense. On the contrary, Semblant designates what organizes psychic life beyond what would be an appearance as opposed to an essence. Semblant is to be related to Truth. Thus, because of the lack and the shift introduced by language, it is not difficult to see that we are always somewhat divided, never completely sure of what we

Let's move forward, still somewhat in the realm of pretense—but unyieldingly and therefore without any pejorative connotation. This is rather our human truth.

sign: As opposed to the signifier (see below), the sign is what represents one subject to another. Unlike the signifier, the sign is entirely identifiable in the animal world.

signifier: Lacan transformed and reused the concept of signifier introduced by the father of linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure. For Saussure, the signifier, the acoustic image—for example, the sound "tree"—constitutes, together with the signified—the concept of tree—the linguistic sign, which refers to the referent, in this case the object tree. For Lacan, taking up Freud's discovery of psychoanalysis as an experience of speech, language is made up of discontinuous elements, signifiers. These are different from one another before they signify anything—which can be seen in the way children play with words—and therefore have the primary function of representing the subject. Hence Lacan's formula: "The signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier." " Thus, the "grasp" of language, which is specific to humans, can also be understood as a "grasp" of the signifier and the laws that organize it (discontinuity, constant referral from one signifier to another, distance from the referent, etc.).

structure: A term that refers to a common meaning and a more specifically psychoanalytic meaning. In the common sense, talking about structure means identifying the latent relationships that exist between the objects being studied rather than their singularities. For the psychoanalyst, structure is what we find to be constant and organizing the subject throughout his or her history. It is this definition that suggests that behind pathologies and behaviors there are structures, in this case: neurosis, psychosis, and perversion. More specifically, in psychoanalysis, structure refers

mainly to what the laws of language impose on the speaking subject. To put it very briefly, according to Lacan, structure is made up of four letters: S barré, SI, S2, and a (see Discourse above).

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superego: A psychic authority whose function is to judge. For Freud, the superego is the prohibitive authority, heir to the Oedipus complex. Melanie Klein demonstrated the precocity of the superego, which does not necessarily wait for the intervention of the father to become active, and thus evoked the existence of a maternal superego. Lacan extended Klein's intuition by drawing on her reference to language: for him, the superego is constituted by the commandments internalized by the subject and thus becomes an instance that prescribes jouissance. In doing so, it must be distinguished from the ego ideal, the symbolic psychic authority that refers to ethical values, which has its roots in the child's admiration for qualities attributed to their parents and which sets the subject on the path to perfection.

symbolic: See Real - Symbolic - Imaginary.

transference: A term that always implies the idea of displacement or transport, which is not specific to psychoanalysis but was first used by Freud to describe what constitutes the driving force of the therapeutic relationship. It refers to the bond that automatically develops between the patient and their psychoanalyst. Transference was first recognized as the operation of transferring affects and feelings onto the psychoanalyst, in short, the type of relationship that organized the subject's encounter with the first figures—usually the mother and father—who determined their subjectivity. Lacan gave this concept a structural dimension by referring to the "subject supposed to know," in other words, by identifying that the patient lends the analyst knowledge about himself that he is precisely seeking. In fact, he uses this knowledge that he lends to his analyst as a lever to gain access to what he does not know about himself.

himself. We can therefore understand how transfer—this assumption of knowledge—is the ultimate tool of analytical work, but also a factor of resistance in therapy, because as long as the patient assumes that the analyst knows, he expects the answer to come from him. The resolution of transference at the end of treatment presupposes first that the patient has had access—always partial—to his unconscious knowledge, but also that he accepts his analyst's non-response to his expectations, not as a consequence of a failure or ill will on his part, but as the price of his subjection to language, which always implies the encounter with an irreducible lack.

Since its "invention" by Freud, the concept of transference has transcended the boundaries of psychoanalysis. It refers to the source of motivation that a subject can find in their emotional attachment to another, particularly to a master figure (teacher, etc.). By extension, it even refers to the relationship that a subject or subjects may have with knowledge. This allows us to speak of collective transference.

Verleugnung: A psychological process identified by Freud late in his career as organizing perversion but also present in all children, usually disappearing in adulthood. Octave Mannoni clearly demonstrates how *Verleugnung* works with an illuminating phrase: "I know... but still..." " (example: "I know very well that death is inevitable... but still..."). In other words, it is a way of both recognizing what is and not recognizing it at the same time. It should be noted that, in the current social context, this psychological process seems to predominate where, in the past, repression was most commonly encountered.

Afterword. Life more

August 2004 - In the large lecture hall of the University of Bogota, where the new academic year is beginning, students are crowded together, mingling with professors from various disciplines, to listen to a French psychoanalyst who has come to talk to them about "What is authoritative today."

The young and brilliant professor of psychology who translates him impeccably, Pio San Miguel, cannot believe his ears either.

According to the Frenchman, there have been three phases in our relationship with authority. In the first, at the beginning, authority was based on animal representations: totem worship is depicted on beautiful pre-Columbian ceramics and manifested in frightening and threatening zoomorphic costumes and human-shaped statuettes.

In the second period—which for Latin America is precisely dated to 1492—authority is supposed to take on a human form. The agents of the human-faced God who disembarked from the caravels exercised a predatory cruelty that struck the populations praying before their totems with such astonishment that they never recovered. Except that the survivors, who would eventually come to power themselves, learned the lesson of a unique form of economy based on the plundering of their own wealth and the unrestrained exploitation of their people.

The third phase began in Europe on a day of celebration, marked - November 9, 1989 - with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Along with it, not only communism collapsed, but also the collective will to control economic processes: political ideologies were declared dead.

The social influence of the liberal model is a side effect of an ideology that is productivist and feeds on the certainty that global enrichment benefits everyone: this is the American model. Why bother distributing scarcity when abundance allows for spontaneous and satisfactory distribution? The rapid rise in living standards in emerging countries seems exemplary in this respect. Political power will therefore be judged on its ability to promote the rise of GNP, in the guise of submitting to a process that dominates it. This can go so far as to subvert its democratic expression when it attempts to redress the excessive inequalities it has created. The economic crisis can thus pit strikes against a much more decisive insurrectionary force.

The essential change that has taken place since Marx is that it is no longer a conflict between two classes, but a conflictual solidarity between interest groups that the political authorities seek to manage in the best interests of the whole. In a context where individual enrichment is supposed to depend on that of the community, the fate of workers seems linked to the fortunes of the company, which in turn depends on the purchasing power of employees (see Keynes).

But this contest of wills, whose opposition is thus settled on the preservation of solidarity, hides the major fact that there is no longer a single will in a position of command. They are all equally subject

— albeit with different benefits — to maintaining a flow of production, exchange, and consumption whose only constant material element is the object. There is no longer a pilot in the plane we are all on; in his place, in the seat — is that reassuring? — is the object.

It is the object that, after the animal and then human god, has come into being: it is the object that is invested with authority in our current third phase.

Admittedly, its representation may vary, but it is recognizable by the unique and identical nature of its promise

— —complete and unlimited enjoyment.

The God of moral law has thus been replaced by the imperative of more enjoyment.

This governing object is certainly not the object of each individual's fantasy, but rather its supposed equivalent, thanks to its ability, made possible by technological genius, to saturate the orifices of the body to the extreme. In other words, alienation is renewed, no longer concerning the self in its relationship to the Ideal, but the "I" captive to a form of enjoyment whose collective nature stifles individual existence.

One of the meanings of globalization is to affirm the successful universalization of the ethics born of technology, where the morality of prohibition specific to the Father of all has failed.

The audience in the Colombian amphitheater showed through their questions that my words seemed as clear to them as the Andean air that bathed the city that day.

In Santiago, Chile, the next stop, it was winter. But friendship earned me a dinner at the home of the president of the Socialist Party, Allende's successor. My host had to force himself to forget the defeat he had just suffered in Parliament, where a center-left government (PS, Christian Democrats, and Greens), despite having a majority, had refused to tax copper mining revenues at 5%. The legal representation of this independent country was still being prevented, albeit without apparent pressure, from providing itself with the financial means for a social security system. The obstructionist may well have had a North American face. But the reality is probably more complex, if it is world metal prices and the profitability of invested capital that determine the viability of mining.

Finally, I went to Rio de Janeiro, where I found confirmation of the disappointment caused by the limited reforms that the "economic situation" is imposing on Brazil's first honest left-wing president.

For more than twenty years, I had seen Lula's hopes grow; they had now turned into a depressive "realism."

I mentioned earlier the many facets of the object that now resides in the Governor's mansion. Yet it has a unique face in the beautiful country of Colombia, and the audience there had no trouble naming it: coca. Its production and sale are the cause of a civil war that has lasted for sixty years and has proved resistant to all political and military initiatives. It is a stark example of an authority that imposes itself on the economy and on people's minds, regulating daily life without offering any leverage to those it oppresses. From the most skilled to the most courageous, they can do nothing about it. Except to eliminate the exceptional profitability of this product in a market estimated at \$500 billion annually.

To achieve this, it would suffice to decriminalize its use and make it available at cost price; it would then be possible to verify that the measure would have little effect on the number of users. But it is the whole country that would be freed from an economy that has become, by and large, one of outlaws.

It is surprising that, in international forums, North Americans, who are supposed to be the first to suffer from Colombian drugs, oppose such a measure, despite its obvious benefits, leading one to question the diversification of their investments.

Drugs are obviously emblematic of the *life* that the current cultural transformation offers us, making us dependent on our own production. But we cannot attribute to this production

any love or the slightest concern for the creatures that cling to them.

And who will be the guardian of our lives—which cannot be reduced to their longevity—when we know the contempt we spontaneously feel for them?

Charles Melman September

2004 17

I

Considerable progress, 19. - Crossing boundaries, 22. - What Freud discovered, 24. - Where has authority gone?, 30. - What place for the subject?, 32. - Progress... really?, 35. - A human nature?, 39. - An economy that encourages incest?, 39. - Envy rather than desire, 42. - The return of authority?, 46. - Depression for all, 48. - Laws we are still dependent on!, 52. - Castration: necessity or contingency?, 54. - Clinical effects, 58.

63

II

Widespread perversion, 63. - The future of the "used," 66. - An economy of signs, 71. - The dual use of pharmakon, 72. - How to escape adolescence?, 74. - The responsibility of the subject, 80. - Inevitable violence, 84. - A knowledge society, 88. 91

III

The father's misunderstanding, 91. - The other is not the stranger, 93. - Patriarchy or matriarchy, 95. - The future of matriarchy, 104. - The laws of language, 108. - Symbolism and symptom, 111. - Social psychosis and subjective channel surfing, 114. - Psychiatry in the face of the new psychic economy, 123. - What can the law do?, 129.

The mark of nostalgia, 133. - A third way?, 137. - Equalization of pleasures, 139. - The fate of great texts,

142. - *A subject finally free!*, 145. - *The death drive*, 148. - *The father today? A comic figure...*, 150. - *A stateless subject*, 155. - *A weak social bond*, 157. - *And still: what is to be done?* 160. - *When science takes the place of text*, 164. - *An unconscious without gender?*, 168.

IV

133

173

V

A changing unconscious?, 175. - *The only serious thing: sex*, 179. - *A transfer that is too real*, 182. - *A change in demand*, 187. - *Who can decide responsibility or irresponsibility?*, 190. - *The avatars of transmission*, 197. - *Always the law!*, 200. - *Death evaded*, 203. - *Denial instead of repression*, 205. - *The craze for sects*, 207. - *Where is education headed?*, 209.

. 213

VI

The discourse of capitalism, 214. - *Doing away with the father on condition of using him*, 218. - *A new psychic economy for the analyst?*, 220.

229

247

263

APPENDICES

Finally, a new jouissance: necroscopy by Charles Melman, 231. - *Introduction to the new psychic economy* by Charles Melman, 237.

Glossary

Afterword (Charles

Melman)[1](#)

S. Freud, "Psychology of Crowds and Analysis of the Ego," in *Essays on Psychoanalysis*, Payot, 1981, p. 123.

[2](#)

J.-P. Lebrun, *Un monde sans limite*, Érès, 1997.

[3](#)

J.-P. Lebrun, *Les Désarrois nouveaux du sujet, Prolongements théorico-cliniques au Monde sans limite*, Érès, 2001. Several authors contributed to this largely collective work.

[4](#)

These were the 4th Rencontres de la psychiatrie (Psychiatry Meetings), held in Paris in March 2001 and organized by Jean-Claude Penochet on the theme "Man put to the test by contemporary society."

[5](#)

What the reader will find in the following six chapters is a reproduction—revised and expanded, of course—of these exchanges.

[6](#)

A protest movement founded in 1957 by Guy Debord and Asger Jom, which initially undertook a critique of art and called for its transcendence. In his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1967, Guy Debord shows how the mediation of commodities and images has invaded the field of human experience, making the "spectacle" the new global social bond. This movement collapsed in 1972 after launching a few prescient slogans such as the famous "Enjoy without restraint!"

[7](#)

The bill authorizing fathers to take paternity leave came into force in France in January 2002. It seems to have become part of everyday life with astonishing speed. Between 4,000 and 5,000

applications per week were received by the Social Security offices. "Without ever having asked for it, fathers have seized paternity leave as if they had been waiting for it for a long time. According to a government report, as of May 1, 2002, 50,000 fathers had already taken advantage of the new paternity leave," announced *Le Monde* on May 14, 2002.

[8](#)

These were conferences organized by the International Lacanian Association, held in Brussels in May 2001 and devoted to "Constructions in Analysis." The proceedings of these conferences were published in the *Bulletin freudien*, the journal of the Belgian Freudian Association, No. 39, April 2002.

[9](#)

This is not a reference to fantasies in their usual sense. It refers here to the organizing fantasy of the subject as discussed in Lacan's teaching (see glossary).

[10](#)

Civilization and Its Discontents is the title of a famous work by Freud, published in 1929. The original title is now sometimes translated as *Malaise dans la culture* (PUF, 1995).

[11](#)

Alain Ehrenberg, *The Fatigue of Being Oneself: Depression and Society*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1998.

[12](#)

In Jacques Lacan, *Autres Écrits*, Seuil 2001, p. 311.

[13](#)

On November 17, 2000, the Court of Cassation in France handed down a ruling—since known as the "Perruche ruling"—authorizing personal compensation for a child born with a disability when, due to medical negligence, his mother had been deprived of the possibility of abortion. This ruling sparked an unusual series of debates, controversies

and initiatives on sensitive legal, ethical and philosophical issues. So much so that it has been called into question. Nevertheless, it remains significant.

[14](#)

German psychiatrist (1855-1926) who introduced the rigor of the natural sciences to psychiatry.

[15](#)

See Charles Melman, Conclusion of the summer seminar devoted to Lacan's Seminar XXI, "Les non-dupes errent" (The Unduped Wander), Turin, August 1997, in *Le Discours psychanalytique*, no. 19, February 1998.

[16](#)

This refers to Lacan's last seminars, in which he linked the three registers he had identified—the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic—in such a way that he gave each of these registers equal value, whereas at the beginning of his work, the Symbolic was in a pre-eminent position.

[17](#)

Allusion to one of Freud's famous "cases," evoking the phobia of little Hans, who had "organized" a fear of horses to mark his territory. The signifier *phobic serves as a reference point around which the subject can organize his existence. See Sigmund Freud, *Five Psychoanalytic Cases*, PUF, 1967.

[18](#)

Freud's most famous cases are mentioned here in succession. ~~See~~ *Five Psycho-Analyses*, supra.

[19](#)

See Charles Melman, "Le complexe de Colomb" (The Columbus Complex), in *D'un inconscient post-colonial s'il existe (On a Postcolonial Unconscious, If It Exists)*, publications of the International Lacanian Association, Paris, 1995.

[20](#)

J. Lacan, "Allocution sur les psychoses de l'enfant" [Address on childhood psychoses], in *Autres Écrits*, Seuil, 2001, p. 369.

[21](#)

French sociologist and ethnologist (1873-1950) who described the social phenomenon in its entirety by demonstrating in his *Essay on the Gift* the importance of gift-giving as the origin of exchange.

[22](#)

This article was originally published in the journal *Art Press*, special issue devoted to "Représenter l'horreur" (Representing Horror), May 2001.

[23](#)

This text was originally published in the journal *La Célibataire* ("Did Lacan perform an act?" Autumn-Winter 2000).

[24](#)

This very brief and approximate glossary, although it sometimes refers to complex concepts, was compiled by Jean-Pierre Lebrun to help readers unfamiliar with psychoanalytic vocabulary. Its sole purpose is to enable readers to continue reading without losing too much of the thread of what is being said. It is based on existing psychoanalysis dictionaries, in particular that of Roland Chemama and Bernard Vandermersch (Larousse-Bordas, 1998).