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For Better or Worst: The Social Bond of Hysterics on Strike

In the Beginning . . .

After much vacillation and rank speculation, the last word of *Totem and Taboo* is decisive: quoting an equally uncertain Faust, Freud declares, "[I]n the beginning was the Deed" (161). What "Deed"? The act in question is Freud's infamous tall tale of the aboriginal murder of the Primal Father, a deed that "made an end of the patriarchal horde" (141), paving the way for the patriarchal family. After establishing this story, Freud tries to decide whether the murder was a factual or psychical reality. If, as Freud argues, the collective act of patricide by the band of brothers solely amounts to a psychical reality, it's no better than the imagined deeds of neurotics who prefer the wishful violent fantasy and respond with guilt and ambivalence, whatever the facts. To avoid reducing his just-so story to the level of the obsessive's psychopomp, Freud takes what he perceives to be the more courageous, if not simply audacious, step of declaring the murder of the Father a historical fact. Freud peered "the backward look behind the assurance / Of recorded history" as T. S. Eliot once wrote, "the backward half-look / Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror" (39), and half-seeing the indeterminacy of psyche and history, he sutured the inaugural wound

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closed with a story of patricide. By symptomatic mistake, Freud reified the obsessive's fraternal myth—and its justification for brotherly solidarity—into a fixed patriarchal origin and ontology.

For Freud, the coordinates of any social bond are underwritten by the dead patriarchal figure and the vertical identification of brothers with and under his sign. Less discussed is how this social order takes the form of obsessive neurosis. *Totem and Taboo's* style—circumambulatory, deferring, and deferential (perhaps nowhere is Freud more replete with citational reference)—is of a piece with the structure of the obsessive neurotic. As with Freud, the obsessive's speech has a grammar, as Pierre-Henri Castel has limned, that wavers between two poles: the prohibition of "absolutely not" that engenders an obsession and the "in spite of oneself" in committing the displaced act, a "*grammatical* solidarity" between obsessions and compulsions (18–19). Quite predictably, then, the social form instituted by the brothers has obsessive characteristics: to live in a self-contained and placid society, the brothers keep the anxiety of *jouissance* associated with the Father—and the aggression and jouissance of their own act—at a safe distance through communal ritual and discipline. The guilt is prohibitive yet productive. As Freud puts it, "The sense of guilt, which can only be allayed by the solidarity of all the participants, persists," and the development of social rules, in turn, assures that "no one of them must be treated by another as their father was treated by them all jointly" (*Totem* 146–47). They avoid the lack of the Other to maintain an unconscious identification with the dead Father and to obsessively avoid causing the Other's jouissance. Accordingly, Freud's ur-myth of patriarchal society conforms the image of civilizational order to the fantastic discipline of obsessive neurosis.

Many commentators have taken Freud to task for his preposterous proposition of the primal crime—pointing out its implausibility, its Lamarckian psychologization of Darwin's original evolutionary idea, and so on—to dispute its empirical actuality (Paul). Around the midcentury, when Freud was an object of criticism and influence on the feminist movement, the clinical, mythical, and institutional narratives of psychoanalysis became a lightning rod for contesting the historical reality of patriarchy. Among Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Juliet Mitchell, Jacqueline Rose, Christopher Lasch, and others, a largely unresolved debate raged over whether Freudian psychoanalysis was another institution of patriarchy.[1] Following Jacques Lacan's return to Freud, Mitchell argued that psychoanalysis did more for immanent critique of patriarchy than any vulgar dismissal.

She neatly summarized the pro-psychoanalysis position by way of Freud's Primal Father myth and its twin, the Oedipus complex:

> *[After the Primal crime], the father thus becomes far more powerful in death than in life; it is in death that he institutes human history. The dead, symbolic father is far more crucial than any actual living father who merely transmits his name. This is the story of the origins of patriarchy. It is against this symbolic mark of the dead father that boys and girls find their cultural place within the instance of the Oedipus complex. (*Psychoanalysis *403)*

For Mitchell, psychoanalysis is not a normative defense but rather a description of patriarchal society, and its myths are the figuration of patriarchy.

Many of the above thinkers wondered about girls' and women's place and development not just in the Oedipal complex but also in this primal myth of patriarchy. After all, in Freud's account, women are ostensibly entirely passive and subjected. The Father "keeps *all* the females for himself," and then they are not freed by their own action; despite each brother's "wish to have *all* the women to himself," the brothers collectively "resign[ed] their claim to the women who had now been set free" (*Totem* 141–43). The object of prohibition against incest and jouissance, women are either passively enrolled in a harem before the murder or, after the murder, they're trafficked as goods to preserve men's pact—a distillation of the political-economic "sex/gender system" that persists, as Gayle Rubin famously decried ("Traffic" 57). Derived from the question of women's role, such criticisms of Freud's cock and bull story strike right at the core of patriarchal myth—maintained by the rituals of obsessive fraternity—but the hysteric appears to be nowhere on the scene.

In this essay, I surface the hysteric's role in Freud's patriarchal ontology. By revisiting Lacan's analysis of the Primal Father myth through his formulas of sexuation (and its axiomatic clinical fact that "there is no such thing as the sexual relation") and his discourse theory, particularly the discourse of the hysteric, I outline the neurotic social bond between hysterics and obsessives. Prior to the distribution of men's and women's political-economic roles, hysterics are seemingly *nowhere* in our origin story, and as an obsessive's narrative, it would only be right that the hysteric is repressed out of sight. My argument is that the hysteric is there from the beginning as neither a woman nor a man; the hysteric is there even, paradoxically, before the beginning of history—as the *absent agent provocateur*, at once innocent of the deed itself yet the reason for its enactment. To develop this

argument through Lacan's work, I demonstrate how the hysteric's symptomatic enactment—the absolute condition of society and history—goes on strike against the social-symbolic order by embodying the social-sexual nonrelation. I conclude by addressing what may at first seem a far-fetched question: are the original brothers, who are obsessives *only after the deed of primal murder*, not themselves the hysterical actors of the patriarchal origin story—a story of the guilt of "ruthless love," to borrow Winnicott's phrase ("Hate" 73)—induced by an unsatisfiable desire?

In what follows, I first determine a Lacanian approach to the existence of sexual exploitation (vis-à-vis the fact that there is no sexual relation) and then discuss Lacan's discourse theory, tracing a path the hysteric might take through the discourse of the university, master, and analyst. I am concerned with the institutions of the patriarchal family and capitalism broadly, so far as the hysteric's desire takes aim at both institutions by going on strike—demonstrating, as Lacan puts it, the hysteric's "fabulous respect for the social bond" (. . . *or Worse* 159). Then, I locate an impasse *within* the hysteric's desire, particularly its dysfunctional enactments around castration, which arise from the hysteric's failed attempt to *wholly embody* the social and sexual nonrelation. By way of this dialectical reversal, in the final section, I delimit the hysteric's version of the social bond to access the truth of the obsessive's dilemma and vice versa. This mediation, I conclude, is the work of politics. In sum, I conceive of the social and political solidarity of castrated (masculine) and not-all castrated (feminine) subjects—whatever their respective choice of neurosis and impossible desires—by tracing the path of the hysteric's desire as it protests its way through institutions.

This essay thus proceeds to clarify what a horizontal social bond would look like by starting from the hysteric's constitutive indetermination—that is, without concluding, as in Freud's account, with the repudiation of femininity or the resurrection of the Father. In other words, what does social solidarity look like when, as psychoanalysis attests, "What is a Man?," "What does it mean to be a father?," and "What does a woman want?" are the "unanswered questions of the speaking animal" (Chiesa 217)? This means outlining a style of social bond different in kind from the one that united the brothers into a fraternal order, which, in turn, means circumscribing and *provisionally* valorizing the hysteric's desire (absented from the brothers' originating myth). In short, if Freud's patriarchal myth is sustained by the obsessive fraternal bond—through vertical identification with a leader—what would be the hysterical sororal bond?

The Myth of the Word

Freud implicitly returns to his ontological myth in "The Question of Lay Analysis" with his own minor revision. "No doubt 'in the beginning was the deed' and the word came later," he writes, but then he adds an enigmatic addendum: "[I]n some circumstances it meant an advance in civilization when deeds were softened into words. But originally the word was magic—a magical act" (188). This palpable tension over origins—the word or the deed—is taken up by Lacan who decides dialectically on the magical founding act of the word: "[I]t was certainly the Word that was in the beginning, and we live in its creation" (*Écrits* 186). For Lacan, though we cannot rule on the empirical origins of language itself (or on the ultimate veracity of any primal myth), creation is retroactive and—by way of the signifier, the linguistic cut of castration—any act is bound up with the phallic function (sexuation) and redescription through writing and speech. It's here that Lacan relieves Freud's dilemma over the truth of the founding act of human civilization. "There is something originally, inaugurally, profoundly wounded in the human relation to the world," Lacan avers (*Ego* 167). The originary ex-sistence of the Word (of speech)—the very hominization of humanity (Freud, *Moses* 112)—is at once the wounding enactment of linguistic castration, its retroactive cause, and its treatment. He, thus, logically derives "the necessity of discourse" (Lacan, . . . *or Worse* 38–43) for speaking beings as the "eminently contingent encounter with the other" (*On Feminine* 145), initiated by the humbling act of giving an account of oneself, of one's myth. The paradoxical effects of this account are perfectly summed up by Freud: "Words can do *unspeakable* good and cause terrible wounds" ("Lay" 188). For Lacan, Freud's patriarchal myth doubles as a myth of the origin of the Word, castration, and sexuation.[2]

In his patriarchal myth, Lacan maintains, Freud said more than he intended by indicating the real impossibility of the sexual relation, even though his misogynistic bias occluded him from seeing it. As Lorenzo Chiesa summarizes, for Freud the Primal Father "embodies or lives the sexual *relationship*, instead of merely founding its phallic *semblance* as an exceptional logical existence deprived of essence" (111). Freud's obsessive move to shore up the Father's authority and outlandish sexual potency, Chiesa elaborates, led him to posit women as a "negative whole," an essential feminine universal ("all women") to be negated: the uncastrated Father has *all* the women, and the castrated men do *not*. By measuring *men and*

women against the uncastrated Father, Freud determined men to be a positive universal by which women are its negative image. By excluding women as a negative totality, "Freud would thus remain a thinker of the [masculine] One," Chiesa summarizes, "of the solidarity between the original Father, Being, and Life" (220). The myth of the horde, Chiesa writes, is a "neurotic product of Freud's [. . .] obsessional inability to fully confront the desire of the hysteric." Precisely by outlining the desire of the hysteric, Lacan rejects Freud's blind depiction of femininity with its positive-meets-negative-pole characterization of sexual difference.

Leaving aside the outsized depiction of the Father, such an "all or nothing" depiction of femininity—the negative or positive postulation of a feminine whole or essence—is altogether consistent with what Freud infamously called the "repudiation of femininity" shared by men and women ("Terminable" 250). The hysteric's fraught question is "What is a woman?" (Lacan, *Psychoses* 178). When faced with this question, according to Freud, women would prefer not to be a woman than to forego rapport with the phallus. Likewise, men would rather cling to their phallus than suffer the abjection of femininity. Thus, in Freud's account, some degree of "penis envy" amounts to a universal affliction, which women suffer the worst and men disguise from themselves, measured against the masculine exception of the uncastrated dead Father ("Terminable" 250–51). As Chiesa has argued, Lacan works against this errant conclusion of a positive or negative feminine essence—mismeasured against the masculine exception of the uncastrated Father, as in Freud—especially when it is taken to be a *total exception* to the phallic function (castration, language, speech). Instead, his revision of the primal myth demonstrates the impossibility of sexual union: both the Father as uncastrated Phallus ("the whole man") and essence of womanhood ("the whole woman") are abolished. Ironically, it is by emphasizing that universal femininity—"all women"—is impossible that Lacan salvages Freud's patriarchal myth from a just-so misogynistic falsehood. Lacan's revision unveils the hysteric in the primal myth and, accordingly, produces a different version of femininity than this misogynistic one.

To determine the effects of the castration of speech, Lacan revisits Freud's myth of the Primal Father as a discourse whereby he parses the logical formulations—the four formulas of sexuation and the aporias of sexual difference—from Freud's imaginary narrative. He suspends the question of empirical veracity and, instead, determines the logical impasses at the heart of patriarchal myth, which is nothing more than the illogic of sexual difference itself. This illogic is exposed by Freud's myth and is

neatly summarized by Chiesa as "there are two sexes, but there is not a second sex" (161).[3] By circumscribing this logical impasse, Lacan argues against idealized complementarity between the sexes—whether in the form of Freud's understanding of his primal myth, the notions of *yin* and *yang*, or Carl Jung's anima and animus (Copjec, *Read* 234). He thereby formalizes the absence of the sexual relation and the asymmetry of sexuation, but he also militates against any essential depiction of sex, which so often slides into misogynistic caricature. *The Woman* (all or none of them)—who *would* partner with the mythic Father and be in relation with the uncastrated Phallus—does not exist.

As I elaborate in the coming sections, the hysteric embodies this impossibility of the sexual nonrelation, because their ontogenetic impasse revolves around the question of woman's castration and the desire for an unsatisfied desire. The hysteric makes sexuation possible with their ambivalence around castration. Moreover, Lacan argues it is precisely those who get hung up on the Father, the uncastrated Phallus, who cannot see that "woman is not linked to castration essentially and access to woman is possible in its indeterminacy" (. . . *or Worse* 35)—and the extent to which the hysteric is likewise hung-up is the extent to which the neurosis wreaks havoc.[4] All told, Lacan's account preserves the indetermination of phallic semblance (of having or being it), of a woman as not-all castrated, and of the open-ended process of sexuation whereby "a boy becomes a man as long as he feigns to be a man, and, vice versa, a girl becomes a woman as long as she feigns to be a woman" (Chiesa 79). In other words, the impossibility of the sexual relation—so far as it's impossible to say *exactly* what relates men and women—is how "man and woman ultimately preserve their indetermination" (217) and can work through the impasses and difficulties of illogical sexual difference.

What's Worse?

In his seminar on May 17, 1972, Jacques Lacan reports how he "got off to the worst start [j'ai commencé dans le pire]" that morning (. . . *or Worse* 159, trans. modified). His property's power was briefly cut while he was working, and it lasted until ten o'clock. Lacan told himself the outage was due to a workers' decision, and though "the power cut caused someone [Lacan?] to smash a tooth mug" he favored, he admits, "you cannot imagine the respect I have for the geniality of this thing known as a strike, industrial action." The power got cut, Lacan imagines, because of the friendly action of workers on strike. Of his fantasm, he enthuses, "A strike is the most social

thing there is in the whole world. It represents fabulous respect for the social bond." The warmth and ironic ebullience of this passage—an ode to the social and what makes it (s)tick—comes clear across, while the context of his minor inconvenience shades into a melodrama of "this morning's aggravation," whereby Lacan gave in to his power being cut for the sake of the social bond. The question then, for us, is what exactly is the social bond for Lacan? Why does it seem bound up with associations of the cut of castration, powerlessness, and, perhaps most strangely, social acts that strike powerfully at the otherwise smooth ordering of day-to-day operations? To state our question as a paradox, how is it that the social bond seems founded on—and, for Lacan, evoked by—what most disturbs, and even undermines, the given social and productive relations?

Why did the strike's irruption get Lacan off to "the worst start?" What, evoking the title of that seminar, is *worse* about it? He says further down, "They are the workers, the exploited, precisely because they still prefer this to sexual exploitation of the *bourgeoise*. That's worse. It's the . . . *or worse*, you understand?" (159). I don't understand at first blush. Is the preference for working the worst thing or is it worse to prefer work to sexual exploitation? The workers are on strike, after all, and maybe Lacan is discouraging them from scabbing. Or is *sexual exploitation of the bourgeoise* what's worse? It's unclear. Note, too, how Lacan uses "bourgeoise," which denotes the "female member of the bourgeoisie," not the class as a whole, and has the ironic connotation in French of "she who rules the roost" (243n2). Would the workers rather work and strike than be a housewife, whose exploited lot they perceive as worse? "Sexual exploitation of the bourgeoise," moreover, introduces ambiguity: does the bourgeoise do the exploiting or are they the exploited? One generic sociological reading could be that workers and housewives are both exploited in their own way, obviously, but Lacan adds an comparative qualifier: one appears worse than the other, and it's not clear whose lot is worse. Maybe they each feel they have it worse off—the worst reading, perhaps. If this dynamic is pursued by two people in earnest, we could have a serious deadlock on our hands. But Lacan maintains, in fact, repeats, "[I]t's not serious. It's not serious" (160).

This brief *commedia dell'arte*, where all involved appear to have a claim to both sides of exploitation, turns around something prior for Lacan. Ultimately, these questions about exploitation are herrings turned red with aggravation or shame, because Lacan neutralizes the scene and places the manifest content on a more latent level: "What does this lead to, laying out articulations concerning things about which one can do nothing? It cannot

be said that sexual relation *presents itself solely* in the form of exploitation. It's prior to that. It's because of this that exploitation is organized, because *we don't even have this kind of exploitation.* There you go. This is worse. It's the . . . *or worse*" (160; my emphasis). Exploitation no doubt presents itself, Lacan argues, and it is *organized* on the basis of sexual relation—something prior and more fundamental. How so, when the sexual relation *presents itself* as sexual exploitation and when, simultaneously, "we don't even have this kind of exploitation"?

His qualification of "solely" is crucial: sexual relation is not exploitative in and of itself. To understand this, Lacan reintroduces one of his more intricate and famous formulations: "[T]here is no such thing as sexual relation" (. . . *or Worse* 162).[5] By this, Lacan is not saying "there is no such thing as sexual exploitation," which, articulated in a feminist discourse critical of sexual exploitation, is demonstrably untrue (MacKinnon). He's saying that there is no such thing as sexual relation whatsoever—a fine but important distinction. Lacan illustrates this in the opening of his session by his nod to the figure of the "bourgeoise," the propertied housewife: a social relation that concretely knots together sexual and economic exploitation (Seccombe). Indeed, if the housewife, like the worker, goes on strike, the social relation of the hearth is destabilized, and the husband is likely dissatisfied in more ways than one: she concretizes, in turn, the nonrelation just as the worker on strike does. The enactment of the social and sexual nonrelation of the housewife's protest is parallel to the industrial worker's strike against the social relation they embody.[6] In short, Lacan's point is that if social relations on strike are a comedy, if they can end well, we owe it to how sexual and social nonrelation underwrites the social bond—which only works if one can go to work, at home or in a factory or wherever, on amenable (that is, imaginary) terms. Such imaginary terms make sexual or social relation appear to work just fine—by a fine margin. To answer Lacan's pessimistic question, it is by rearticulating what symbolically *constitutes* this imaginary margin that something can, in fact, be done.[7]

Lacan argues for this by way of a *reductio ad absurdum*: if the sexual relation truly existed—as exploitative, sublime, idyllic, romantic, whatever—it would be "a discourse that would end badly." Why? Because the discourse would "not be a semblance" necessary to social bonds, and relations would then forever be as they appear. Without the social-sexual nonrelation logically prior to their organized exploitation, the worker or the wife—we might as well include the husband, too—would have no recourse to untie, reknot, or sever the bond that binds them. This marginal difference

introduced by the play of appearance is what Lacan calls *semblance*, produced by the *real* gap in what escapes between our *imaginary* playacting and our social-*symbolic* roles (worker, husband, wife). Because of this gap—this nonrelation, this nothing—we are not bound hand, foot, and soul to social bonds once and for all, though the discourses that structure them are most formidable and the jouissance of their real loss is an ambiguously pleasurable suffering.

In the case of Lacan's example, as the one who works to make things work—through embodying loss, imaginary contestation, and symbolic enactment—the worker on hysterical strike is a superlative worker! S/he appeals to what's beneath the organization of their exploitation as a worker: the nonrelation, which allows for the terms of their exploitation to change in a renewed union contract or to be severed altogether in a worker-led revolt or divorce. One can likewise imagine exchanges between the mutually bound husband and wife—a relation that resembles the trade unionist and capitalist—who insist on working the social relation out for everyone. Just as Marx once argued that the anatomy of civil society is found in political economy, for Lacan, the anatomy of the social bond—structured by discourse—is founded, and founders, on social nonrelation. Lacan, in short, agrees with Marx that "[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness," but he adds a prior dimension of social existence that is veritably unconscious and structured. Social existence, the social bond, arises out of the social nonrelation, as structured by the capitalist discourse of exploitation or, to press for revolution, some *other* discourse.[8]

By following the signifier (what's "worse"?) of this vignette in Lacan's session—to analyze his speech like an analysand, something he encouraged his audience to do—we elucidated Lacan's answer: "semblance [of the social bond] . . . or worse" (*Other* 159).[9] This vignette announces Lacanian analysis's supplementary relation to Marxist analysis, the concrete social formations of the patriarchal family and the workers' movement, and the notion of the strike as a quintessential expression of the social bond. Moreover, it demonstrates how the apparent harmony of social bonds is underwritten by a fundamental discordance, which the hysterical strike enacts.[10] Nevertheless, it's possible that the way Lacan resituates exploitation around a prior absence and impossibility is a baroque apologia for the existence of sexual exploitation. Per Lacan, however, the insistence of the impossibility of the sexual relation is the grammar of what he calls the "body's refusal" that afflicts the hysteric—the refusal of bodily enslavement

to the social relation—that strikes against any arrangement (exploitative, sexual, or otherwise) (*Other* 94). Lacan's valorization of the hysteric's refusal chimes with a recent point made by Jacqueline Rose in *On Violence and On Violence against Women*, when she distances herself from the position "which sees violence as the unadulterated and never-failing expression of male sexuality and power, a self-defeating argument if ever there was one (if true, then men will rule the world for ever)" (9). Rose's political project of naming "masculinity in its worst guise," while allowing to "individual men the potential gap between maleness and the infinite complexity of the human mind," is itself made possible by the absence of the sexual relation—whose elaborated discourse is that of the hysteric and their refusal of a totalizing embodiment. Lacan, on exactly these terms, gives preeminence to the hysteric's desire to animate discourse around this impossibility.

The Four Impossible Discourses

From the beginning of his seminars in 1953, "discourse" was a prominent concept in Lacan's theory of the subject. As he stated in 1955, "[T]he unconscious is the discourse of the other . . . it is the discourse of the circuit in which I am integrated. I am one of its links. It is the discourse of my father, for instance" (*Ego* 89). Here, the unconscious is likened to a circuit of discourse composed of social links, another signifier for the social bond. Caught up in this circuit, speech is an intersubjective phenomenon constituted by a social-symbolic order. Certain declarations are, in turn, made possible by the discourse in which it figures. "You are my master" traverses a discourse whereby "I am your disciple." Likewise, "You are my father" is speech enmeshed in a discourse whereby "I am your son." A third-person discourse already in play—of the family or teaching, of one's parents or education—allows for these second-person speech acts by which we intersubjectivize the social-symbolic role assumed in the first person. The reflexive intersubjectivity of the social bond, in short, takes the form of a grammar articulated through some Other transindividual discourse (Lacan, *Écrits* 291). Lacan's theory of the unconscious subject and its bonds are from the first bound up with a linguistic grammar and social order. Thus, twenty years later, Lacan summarizes: "[T]he notion of discourse should be taken as a social link (*lien social*), founded on language," castration and the social-sexual nonrelation (*Other* 33).[11]

In his seminars from 1969 and 1970, titled *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan set out to reduce all of human discourse to four structural

orders representing four fundamental social bonds. As Mark Bracher has characterized them, "[H]is schemata of the four discourses [represent] four key social phenomena: educating [university discourse], governing [the master's discourse], desiring and protesting [the hysteric's discourse], and transforming or revolutionizing [the analyst's discourse]" (34). The emphasis, moreover, has shifted away from speech. Lacan says these are "discourses without speech" (*Other* 166), but note how they signify verbs: they do work. We can also understand this as a rearticulation of latent and manifest content. The manifestations of intersubjective speech are symptoms of the structures that speak its subjects—considering how *manifestation* in French means "event," "demonstration," "protest," and, most evocatively, "symptom." Each discourse is a historical event demonstrating a social bond that symptomatically protests a fundamental nonrelation the discourse works to conceal. We could say the discourses produce the symptomatic discontent (*Unbehagen*) of the four impossible social bonds. This impossibility reflects how Freud saw governing, education, and psychoanalysis as impossible professions. To this, Lacan adds the vocation of desire as figured by the hysteric, and the hysteric's symptomatic desire traverses all four insofar as hysterical desire is a protest against the discourse in which a subject is enmeshed. Though Lacan argues the master's discourse is historically and structurally primary, he also paradoxically suggests, as Patricia Gherovici has elaborated, that "the hysteric [i]s the one who makes the man (or the Master)" (58). The hysteric, Lacan says, "unmasks the master's function with which she remains united" (*Other* 94).

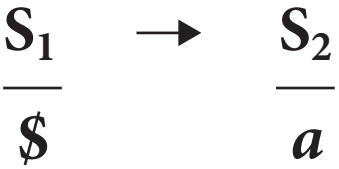

Figure 1
The Master's Discourse (Clemens and Grigg, introduction 3)

This schema of the master's discourse presents all of the terms that make up a discursive structure for Lacan. They can be articulated as follows: "S_1 master signifier; S_2 knowledge, as in *le savoir* or 'knowing that–,' $ The divided subject, [and] *a* [cause of desire]" (Clemens and Grigg, introduction 3). There are two levels: on the top level is the manifest social bond, on the bottom are latent elements that support the relation in its impossibility. In the case of the master's discourse, the social relation is between a master signifier (the master's command) and its justifying knowledge

(the slave's service) on top—and the split subject (the master's impotence) and its cause of desire (the master's unknown) on the bottom. Lacan then adds a bar between the terms along the bottom. In the master's discourse, this is a blockage between $ and *a*, which is Lacan's formula for fantasy. In other words, it's not simply that the master's discourse—one wherein a subject appears to coincide with itself by knowing itself—only promotes a kind of self-mastery: mastery is supported by what escapes it. The master is only a self-consistent master—an illusory social bond—insofar as they do not know the fantasy that supports the illusion (Verhaeghe, "Letter" 90). Thus, by completing the structure, Lacan shows what each corner of the structure does and how they relate (by way of the arrows) for the algorithm to function (Vanheule 5). Though layers are added to this palimpsest in later years, he represents it this way in 1969–70:

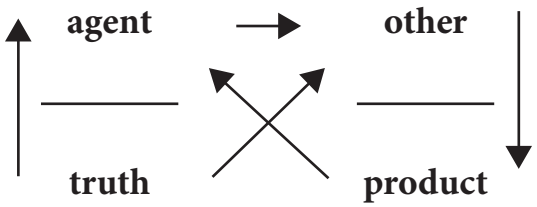

Figure 2
Discourse Formula (Vanheule 5)

To summarize, the agent (master) addresses the other (a discourse of knowledge); this is the top arrow running left to right. The far-left arrow pointing up signifies how the truth of the agent is concealed (the master is split). That truth is related to the other (knowledge), indicated by the diagonal left-right arrow. The other is nevertheless lacking (knowledge does not account for what the master wants), and this points to what's produced (the object *a*: what's lacking, cause of desire). Finally, the product loss (object *a*) returns to the agent, the right-left diagonal, as what is agitating (jouissance) and in want of articulation to justify the master's desire. If what obtains between truth (the split subject) and the product-loss (object *a*) is never placed in relation, then the master's fantasy is not articulated.

The social bond of the discourse functions by concealing what makes it (not) work. "A particular discourse facilitates certain things and hinders others," writes Bruce Fink, and "allows one to see certain things while blinding one to others" ("Master" 30). This is true for all the discourses, produced by turning the terms but keeping the structure, arrayed below:

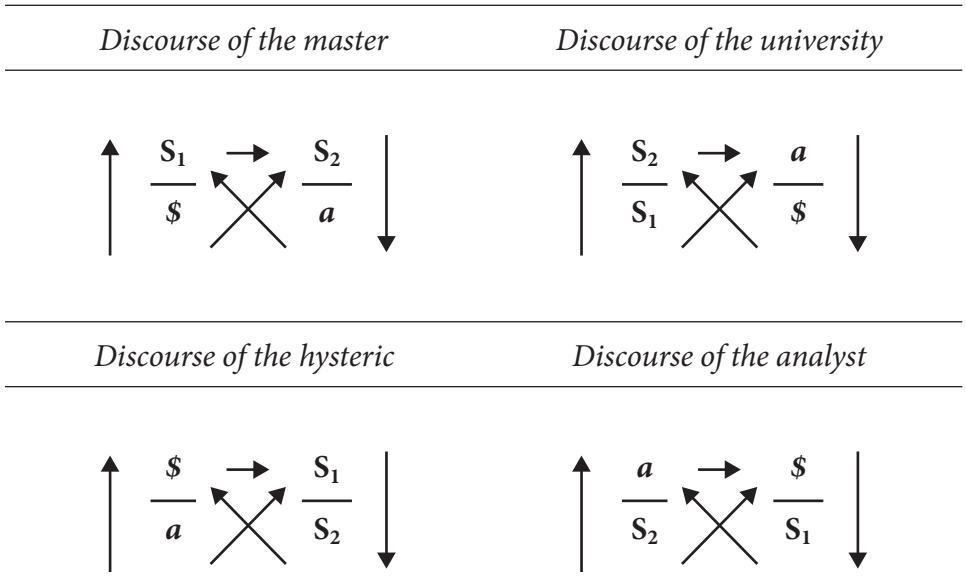

Figure 3
The four discourses (Vanheule 3)

The way out of the infernal loop of the master is by turning it upside down and reversing it such that it becomes the discourse of the analyst. In the latter, the object cause of desire (*a*), figured by the analyst, is the agent addressing the split subject as the other, the master now supine on the psychoanalytic couch where their fantasy might be articulated in the transference. Now let's turn to the hysteric's discourse and highlight its relation to the discourses of the master and university.

The hysteric addresses herself as the split subject to the master and their knowledge, in the form of a denunciation: "You, too, are also split, and your command of knowledge is empty." As Alenka Zupančič has put it, for the hysteric, the master "is precisely not castrated enough" (165). This command has the effect of setting the master to work producing new knowledge, but although the hysteric enjoys the knowledge, they also take exception to it. Canonically, this is expressed by Dora ending her analysis and, thus, repudiating the knowledge Freud generates to interpret her symptom—taking exception, particularly, to her objectified role in an exogamous heteronormative family romance (Grigg 62). This is figured in the schema as a blockage between the knowledge produced and the object *a*: a relation does not obtain between the cause of the hysteric's desire (the truth) and the knowledge produced about it. The hysteric is the unconscious embodiment of the disjunction between truth and knowledge.

Because of this, as Lacan puts it in Seminar XVII, the hysteric "goes on a kind of strike" against the prevailing order of knowledge (*Other*

94). The strike symptomatically expresses the alienation—indeed, the impossibility—of the social bond the hysteric has with the master's knowledge. By the same token, what the hysteric symptomatically produces—a master signifier to name their symptom, as indicated in the left-right diagonal arrow—is likewise indicated as lost satisfaction: the hysteric desires an unsatisfied desire, of which the master is a function. We are now prepared to understand one of Lacan's most infamous declarations: "She wants a master. [. . .] She wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things, but at the same time she doesn't want him to know so much [. . .]. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. She reigns, and he does not govern" (129). The social bond of the hysteric with the master is, paradoxically, motivated by going on strike against the master's signifiers that principally organize the symbolic order. Indeed, Lacan wonders whether or not this discourse of desire is responsible for making the master discourse function at all. The discourse of desire, we are led to believe, reigns over governance itself—setting in motion the very terms of social discourse. And in the context of a psychoanalytic understanding of society, how could it be otherwise?

A Father, Capitalist Master . . . or Worse?

There's a divide of interpretation about where exactly to locate capitalism in Lacan's discourse theory from the '60s and '70s seminars (Tomšič).[12] Stijn Vanheule has persuasively argued that, from the late 1960s onward, Lacan formulated capitalism as a distinct aberration of the master's discourse, constituting an implied fifth discourse that does not have the same structural historicity as the more fundamental four. Unlike the timeless others, capitalism might be a historical departure, not a discursive constant: an aberration that can be overcome. Slavoj Žižek ("Objet"), Oliver Feltham, and Geoff Boucher have each argued that capitalism is just one discursive transformation of the master discourse whereby capitalism becomes the occluded master signifier in the university discourse, particularly given the premium it places on scientific management and the know-how of bureaucracy as social control to produce surplus. Following Lacan in Seminar XVII, they equate the university discourse with both Stalinist bureaucracy of state socialism and market-oriented liberal capitalistic "democracy." Mladen Dolar has split the difference succinctly: "Capitalism is instated in conjunction with the university discourse, its twin and double" (136). For our purposes, we are going to consider capitalism as working through the university discourse because we not only

want to locate the master signifier of capitalism so that we might strike against it but we also want to trace how the hysteric's strike extends from its classical locus in the familial order to its counterpart of workers on strike. We are justified in this because, just as the analyst's discourse is the inverse of the master's, the other side of the hysteric's discourse is the university discourse.

One discourse produces the other. You'll notice the university discourse produces (bottom right corner) the split subject, the first term of the hysteric's discourse, while the hysteric's discourse produces S_2, know-how, the first term of the university discourse. The subject, particularly the hysterical subject,[13] traces a loop-de-loop through the two discourses. The symptomatic truth (bottom left) of the hysterical subject—object *a*, what escapes articulation—becomes what is addressed by the university discourse (top right), whereby object *a* is addressed by knowledge. In the university discourse, a hysterical subject can address the position of *a* by commanding knowledge. Through the university discourse, a hysteric can become the student of their symptom—learning something about it, and perhaps alleviating it somewhat—but it also initiates a search for the master of knowledge of her symptoms, a master whose knowledge she would reject anyway, producing anew the split subject. In both the hysteric's discourse and the university, the hysteric strikes against the social bond involved, but with an ironic effect: the hysteric receives the knowledge the master produces of her symptom back in an inverted form through her study, which urges her to seek out an-other elusive master who, if encountered, would only regenerate her symptoms. What does this have to do with capitalism's exploitative role in the university discourse?[14]

In the university discourse, Lacan says the student, as object *a*, is in a position of "more or less tolerable exploitation" (178). But as Rebecca Colesworthy has illuminated, "[T]he hysteric is the one for whom exploitation has become intolerable." The hysteric's strike repudiates the exploitation, even as "she 'doesn't give up her knowledge.'" That knowledge bears on a certain truth of her symptom, her enjoyment: "a work for which she is never compensated but for which she in fact pays" (36). A hysterical student pays to study for the knowledge that exploits her symptom and, indeed, makes it her work to understand it. When it comes to this precarious subject, Colesworthy argues, her life "becomes worth living only when she decides, absolutely, to go on strike" (37). There is a profound truth to this, but we might also heed something cautionary that Lacan says to his hysterical, striking students: "[P]sychoanalysis enable[s] you to locate what it is exactly

that you are rebelling against—which doesn't stop that thing from continuing incredibly well" (*Other* 208).

For the hysteric to exit the long march through the institutions of her own discourse and the exploitative form of the university, she might appeal to the analyst's discourse to clarify the hysteric's desire. The analyst's discourse produces the split subject's—the hysteric's—master signifier. What does this mean? Does the hysteric want an analyst qua master or a new master qua analytic discourse? Does the hysteric want the master signifier in the university discourse, insofar as the truth of the university is that it is mastered by capitalism? The historical example of Dora and our example of the student-worker on strike would suggest absolutely not. What does the hysteric on strike, absolutely, want? No boss, no analyst, no bureaucrat will do. No one says, "No God, No Master," and means it quite like the hysteric.

We are, therefore, thrown into the paradoxical position of offering an imminently refusable psychoanalytic interpretation of the hysteric's desire for a new master signifier.[15] This requires some deliberate indirection. Thus, we might ask a deceptively simple question: where can the institution of the family be located in Lacan's four discourses? Does it get subsumed, like capitalism and science, into the university discourse? Lacan devoted a large portion of Seminar XVII to diagnosing the Oedipus complex as Freud's dream to save the father (Grigg; Verhaeghe, *New*). The rest is devoted to generating and historicizing the four discourses—but strikingly, the family never comes to stand as a discourse on its own. Summarizing this shift in Lacan's thinking in Seminar XVII, Verhaeghe has written that, with the introduction of the master signifier (S_1), "it is clear that we are a long way from the exclusive signifier of the Name-of-the-Father. Good-bye *pater potestas patris familias*" (17). The master agency transcends the father and relegates his position—and the institution of the patriarchal family—to a second order effect of the master signifier. Because it is structured by something else, the patriarchal family is not itself a structure. Though the father could be a master signifier for a subject, it's neither inevitable nor necessary.

For Lacan, the hysteric's discourse is one that, paradoxically, resists discourse—as far as the subject resists becoming reduced to a mere object in its reproduction—and it is given pride of place where the family might instead be. Not a fundamental discourse, the family is a matter of education and a concern of government and should be seen as a wish or a fantasy—not a structure. Whose fantasy is the patriarchal family? The hysteric's. For the hysteric, the father's role undergoes "symbolic appreciation," Lacan says, whereby "it is the father, insofar as he plays this pivotal, major

role, this master's role in the hysteric's discourse" (*Other* 95). As indicated in the schema of the hysteric's discourse, the master signifier is produced as symptomatic agitation. The hysteric, in short, symbolically creates the Patriarch by ensuring his (often negative) symbolic idealization through castration. Indeed, Lacan says straightforwardly that the truth of the hysteric is their knowledge that the master is castrated. But even as they enact an idealizing castration, the truth of this knowledge is symptomatically occluded from the hysteric: the hysteric moves beyond the capture of knowledge, eluding yet inducing the master's jouissance and epistemophilia.[16] Thus, the hysteric prefers to stay at the level of castration (nonrelation), which amounts to impossible silence.

So what do we make of Freud's own idealization of the Primal Father, which we characterized as obsessive? Lacan offers a plain answer here: Freud also gives us an idealized version of the uncastrated Father by way of the primal horde myth and the Oedipus Complex, but the obsessive move Freud makes is to "mask" the lack in the Other, motivated by trying to save the father from castration, making the family man equal the authority of the Father in the consulting room and elsewhere. The hysteric, for their part, unmasks this fraud. This complex dynamic of masking and unmasking is part of what Lacan means when he says obsessives and hysterics are dialectical variations of one another. Whereas for both, "the image of the ideal Father is a neurotic's fantasy," which is ultimately a wish regarding the "dead Father," neurotics are distinguished by "the obsessive's fundamental need to be the Other's guarantor, and by the Faithlessness of hysterical intrigue" (*Écrits* 698). The hysteric and obsessive are, in a sense, at loggerheads over the status of the dead Ideal Father, but in a way that maintains his constant resurrection in one guise or another.

Some Lacanians are wont to point out what they call "the decline of the symbolic,"[17] which they relate to what they symptomatically see as the historical decline of paternal authority.[18] But hysterics demonstrate how that decline is part and parcel of the familial fantasy and its destitution. Doesn't hysterical desire ultimately exceed the father altogether? In *Enjoy Your Symptom*!, Žižek argues that the choice Lacan offers in his later seminars is "The Father . . . *or worse*" (77).[19] Could the hysteric not respond to this with what Charcot called her "beautiful indifference" (*la belle indifference*): "What Father? As you say, he's dead, and we've moved on." In other words, the hysteric's discourse of desire is politically effective precisely to the extent that they go on strike to abolish (*Aufhebung*) institutions, rendering the fantasies involved therein destitute by desiring

something else, something beyond. Hysterics make desire reign, which exceeds governing institutions.

By that logic, if the old patriarchal father is figured more formidably by the new capitalist master supporting today's university discourse, the hysterical students and workers on strike are not simply limited to loving and idealizing the capitalist master who secretly commands the university's knowledge. They are not themselves thwarted capitalist masters in abeyance. Insofar as the exploitation of that structure is intolerable, desire is the sublimatory possibility to go on strike, via hysterical identification, to induce the latent crisis immanent to capital's stranglehold on the university discourse and its subjects. Perhaps it is a hubristic risk, but the hysteric wagers on the productive possibilities of precipitating a collective crisis: "give us the semblance of a new master . . . or *worse*."[20] This capacity to animate the One into the semblance of existence yet expose the Other's inexistence—to demand and refuse a master with each and every breath by refusing to be an objectified support, which would assure the existence of the symbolic order—is what Lacan calls the truth of the hysteric.

Accordingly, by following the hysteric's desire, another solidarity can be conceived beyond the vertical relation of the Father. Recall that Freud hypothesized a form of solidarity, in *Totem and Taboo*, by way of the brothers of the primordial horde who identify with the totem of the dead Primal Father. Then, in *Group Psychology*, he argues that they jointly identify with a leader who comes to metaphorically stand in for the dead father based on a unary, and unifying, trait (*einiger Zug*). Freud's account is limited: he conceives of solidarity as based solely on a vertical identification with a totem of authority through which objectified social roles are formed.[21] But he also offers an alternative example of horizontal solidarity based on the discourse of the hysteric. Zupančič suggests as much when she retells Freud's story at a girl's boarding school: "one of the girls gets a letter from her secret lover which upsets her and fills her with jealousy, which then takes the form of an hysterical attack. Following this, several other girls in the boarding school succumb to the same hysterical attack." The girls identify horizontally, coming to share in "the moment of crisis in her relationship" (156). They embody a kind of hysterical solidarity of the crisis of the (sexual) nonrelation, by means of identification, to manage it and act in concert. They unconsciously go on strike *together*—an exemplary expression of the collective social bond if ever there was one. But what happens after the strike and the exposure of the crisis in social relations? What happens when the girl stops idealizing her impossible lover and providing the occasion for identification? Do her

friends abandon her? How does one persist in collective activity beyond crisis? How does the obsessive respond to this crisis?[22] Does the hysteric's social bond help us clarify this? In the next section, I clarify the hysteric's impasses to explore if there is a sisterly bond to be had between neurotics, but this possibility is bound up with the hysteric's brother, the obsessive, to whose myth of the Primal Father we will return.

Hysteria Is (Not) the Worst

Hysterics fail to realize their wish for inexistence with respect to the phallic function, the castrating operation of speech. This is the characteristic dissatisfaction of hysteria, which plays out in a staged encounter with a master but is ultimately independent. The hysteric wrestles with the very formula of logical impossibility in Lacan's four formulas of sexuation: "There does not exist a woman for whom the phallic function cannot be written" (105). This formula resembles but is logically distinct from another one of Lacan's formulae, the one for the exceptional Father or uncastrated Master, where the negation is solely on the predicate: "There exists a man for whom the phallic function cannot be written."[23] Between these two formulas lies the hysteric's contest and struggle: they resist the phallic function and wish to be unified with the One "for whom the phallic function cannot be written." What the hysteric wishes is to take *total* exception to the phallic function, to the social-symbolic order as such, but this is impossible. Yet, by embodying this impossibility, the hysteric's wish resists sexuation. Accordingly, hysteria is the condition of sexuation, and the neurotic hysteric gets caught up and protests its social-symbolic process.

There are two dialectical moments of the hysteric's desire, which unfolds as wish and refusal. The hysteric's "beautiful indifference" is, in fact, the formality of sexuation *prior* to the phallic function. They embody the logic of impossibility of "there does not exist . . . ," figured by the notion of indifference, which amounts to an impossible wish to refuse sexuation and differentiation—to refuse speech, more simply. When faced with the possibility of either having or being the phallus, the hysteric tries to embody the zero of inexistence—the truth of the absence of the sexual relation—preferring it to the phallic function. The hysteric's choice of "not-having" the phallus is, thus, "a desire to be the Phallus, to fully identify with the zero as one, and thus [. . .] couple with the One" (175). This amounts to creating a symbol for man—the overvaluation of an illusory figure who has circumvented the phallic function (castration)—and it's how the hysteric makes the Man, the

Patriarch, the Master. But because this figure is an uncastrated exception that constitutes a universe of castrated particulars (whom we call men), the hysteric seeks out a relation with the One (imagined as an exceptional Man) only to be dissatisfied.

The hysteric is caught inexorably between a wish to be a universal exception of the phallic function and a refusal to be castrated in the way men are. In this way, "men" and "women" can both be hysterics, because it's a question of how one's sexuation stands with respect to an exceptional uncastrated figure. In the terms of Freud's primal myth, from which Lacan derived his formulas, the hysteric wishes to fuse impossibly with the uncastrated figure of the Father, to be the impossible partner of "every woman." As Lacan points out about the myth, there is no "every woman"—certainly nobody could satisfy every woman, let alone even one, he quips. Yet the desire to be every woman—outside the phallic function (castration)—amounts to a desire to be "outside sex" (Chiesa 125–27).

The second move deals not with the phallic exception—either figured by "every woman" or the "Primal Father"—but as having to do with the phallic function: the hysteric "refuses to be the object of man's phantasy, for this is nothing but an index of castration." Precisely through refusal, woman "arises from this failure of feminine universalization ['every woman']: she is not-all caught in man's phantasy" (Chiesa 175). Generated by the failure of the objectification of "every woman," a phallic fantasy which *would* constitute a "second sex," the not-all of woman's singularity is what Lacan calls the object *a*, the inarticulable remainder of what's *not* captured through the phallic function in speech (*On Feminine* 28).[24] The hysteric's struggle for and against impossibility—formulated as "There does not exist a woman for whom the phallic function cannot be written"—engenders an ontogenetic impasse whereby a hysteric becomes a woman, formulated as "For not-all of woman the phallic function can be written." In this way, hysteria engenders the possibility of becoming a woman without thereby ratifying a universal femininity. Hysteria is the condition of sexuation, but this process is, in turn, circumscribed by the impossibility of Womanhood and the question of one's sex with respect to phallic fantasy. Womanhood is a real impossibility that is phallically articulated one by one, one woman at a time. In this way, the articulation of becoming a woman is part and parcel of the impossible saying of one's singular desire by way of the object *a*—the want-to-be—which is itself the practice of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacanian psychoanalysis models itself on how a hysteric becomes a woman. A more radical conception of gender formation understood through Lacanian

psychoanalysis—one which is more open to trans* desire as a viable expression of sexuation—could start from this exact premise.

In the opening pages, we saw how, by way of his determination of a feminine universal whereby "every woman is phallic" and, thus, castrated, Freud arrived at his "repudiation of femininity." Similarly, the hysteric tries and fails to prop up a universal femininity whereby "every woman is not phallic," a negation that suggests women are wholly not castrated ("no woman is castrated"), which ultimately posits a sexual relation. This is unsustainable for the hysteric because it is at variance with an attempted embodiment of the absence of the sexual relation. The hysteric's negation of the negative positing of "every woman" with a positive formulation of the essence of femininity, ironically, ends up figuring as the objectification of the sexual relation—contravening the hysteric's attempted strike. The hysteric's strike qua unconscious fantasy of the essence of femininity ("every woman") misses its target and becomes metabolized in the existing phallic order—where nothing new is produced and the hysteric falls back on a mythical existence as the complement of Man—or returns to their concrete hysterical embodiment of the absence of the sexual relation. Instead, woman has to do with the phallic function, yet a woman is not wholly articulated by the phallic function, so contingently speaking, "For not-all of woman the phallic function can be written." This contingent *phallicization* of a woman is precisely why a woman is both inside and outside the phallic function—that she says yes and no to it, so to speak—and why, as Lacan puts it, a woman's positive status is undecidable and divided by this paradox.

To account for these complex dynamics, Lacan insists on a paradoxical formulation of femininity, one that avoids universalization of the "second sex." Lacan is emphatic: "[W]oman is not essentially linked to castration," because "they are not castratable." To the extent that woman "has to do with castration" it is through "an insignificant little nothing" so far as a woman is the object *a* of phallic jouissance (. . . *or Worse* 35). In other words, the hysteric can "say yes" to the phallic function and articulate the object *a*—their want-to-be—by becoming a not-all castrated woman and counted as singular in the phallic order without being totalized therein. Thus, because not-all phallic, a woman is not reducible to an "objective" phallic fantasy, and more importantly, a woman in-exists beyond the phallus. This latter horizon is the privilege of woman, one that amounts to the barred symbolic Other. Femininity, for Lacan, is both the supplement of the phallic order that sustains the semblance of the Other and a figure of the nontotalizability of the symbolic order as the barred Other: Woman is

not-One but is not the hysterical inexistence of zero either. Lacan's paradoxical formulation of femininity serves to clarify why the hysteric goes on strike against the symbolic order, fails to attain positive existence thereby, and nevertheless transformatively gestures toward what is half-said and nontotalizable therein.

We can now ask how the social crisis engendered by the hysteric's strike can be supported in political solidarity between neurotics—hysterics and obsessives alike—toward socially transformative collective action. This process is analogous to how the hysteric becomes a woman. In a remarkable essay on how demanding the impossible makes space for social change, Tracy McNulty convincingly argues that "the end of analysis could be construed not merely as liberation but as a call to change the world by demanding that it make place for a new object" (33). Moreover, the impossible desire articulated through analysis, by staging a confrontation with castration, "allows the analysand to free himself," by articulating their lack, their want-to-be, and thus, a "new object" is engendered "that intervenes in the world so as to transform it" (4). This amounts, in the end, to articulating the lack in the Other: the object *a*, the barred Other. Curiously, however, McNulty maintains that "only a subject can act: there is nothing like a shared or collective act" (9). Perhaps because her examples derive from the Abrahamic religion (Isaac, Moses, Jesus)—a genealogy of exceptional figures who, as Freud once traced, all harken back to the Father's primal murder—McNulty presents the social tie in Freud's vertical terms of substitute leaders who expose the lack in the Other and then face a fractious and inadequate following easily sidetracked by way of pacifying ideals or induced to violent repression, which sutures closed the wound of the lack in the Other. There is truth to this, yet what we've covered about the hysteric elaborates and clarifies McNulty's account of the possibility of social transformation and suggests, nevertheless, the possibility of collective acts.

We've seen the outline of a social bond of collective crisis in the form of what is parodically but no less truthfully called "mass hysteria." By following the logic of the hysteric's strike, which embodies the impossible and contests the symbolic order, we can circumscribe how a social crisis is induced by unmasking the absence of the social and sexual relation, but the key dilemma—and the question of political strategy and solidarity—is how to sustain collective activity without straying into the hysteric's idealization of something exceptional to the social order, like a leader or idol. In short, we must situationally determine how to formulate a horizontal solidarity that does not console itself about the absence of social relation through a negative

or positive idealization of the exceptional Father, universal womanhood, or the One—to determine how to make solidarity one-by-one without lapsing into the zero of inexistence. This amounts to ex-sisting within the ambiguities and contingencies of indetermination—made possible by the absence of the social relation—through a practice of articulating the want-to-be of what is not-yet born but will have been.[25]

Crucially, this process resembles but is not reducible to articulating one's singular desire in the psychoanalytic act. Collective action must, accordingly, take its cue from the hysterics' strike but also learn their lesson and circumscribe what escapes the phallic function as the transformative want-to-be by saying the impossible, which also says the impossible as unsayable. In short, no doubt McNulty is right that "desire must find expression in an act or in the production of a new object that intervenes in the world so as to transform it" (10), but I do not agree that such a process is "absolutely singular and subjective" (11). In fact, not simply demanding the impossible, as the hysteric does unconsciously, but saying, acting, and venturing toward the impossible together is to what revolution aspires. To be sure, it is precisely what is figured in the solidarity of the psychoanalytic act, but it requires more than one person all alone. This can be best demonstrated by answering our original question of where the hysterics are in the myth of primal crime, the first revolution as Herbert Marcuse once argued (69).

Hystory: Making Common Cause

Lacan spelled *histoire*, which also means "story" in French, as *hystoire*, exposing history's intimate relation to hysteria (Soler 262). As Jacques Alain-Miller puts it, the hysterical "y" indicates the fact that a "story is told for an other" in order to "make sense of his traumas, of his indelible images, of his monumental scenes, or of his gaps" (14). There is a distinction but also inevitable confusion between history (as an empirical discipline) and hystory (the patient's psychoanalytic story). Whereas "the former is entirely aimed at 'making us believe that it has some sort of meaning,'" the latter is focused on the stupidity voiced by the patient, "what agitates and stirs things up" (Chiesa 18–19). We defer to the former, but psychoanalytic babbling articulates "what bothers speaking beings" and gives "a shadow of life to the feeling called love" (19). Capturing the excessive charge of hystory, Chiesa concludes, "it is only stupidity, rather than the attempt to formulate a meaningful discourse, which upholds our love stories—as a stand-in for the absence of the sexual relationship."

As Lacan says, "*jouissance* is not a sign of love" (*On Feminine* 24) and "is marked and dominated by the impossibility of establishing as such [. . .] the One of the 'sexual relationship'" (6–7). Because two lovers do not make a whole—do not make One—they are forced into that traumatic gap and dashed against the rocks of jouissance, which is not mutual and separates them, such that love, which *would* make One, is demanded again and again. The repetitive stupidity of our love stories is the force of history and the hysterical reason for its telling, and despite the jouissance that segregates each person from the other, the appeal to love, the analytic mainspring, is bound up with the curative production of discourse. As we've seen, the hysteric's desire is for a truth that exceeds discourse and knowledge, and in its way produces the jouissance of the master who would command knowledge and the social order. "Truth," Lacan euphemizes, is "the little sister of *jouissance*" (*Other* 116), so if there is truth, it is not without jouissance, there at the limits of knowledge. Yet, it is through retelling *hystory*—our hysterical, stupid love stories—to account for the traumatic pleasures and pains of jouissance that we arrive at some half-said truth of history.

Freud's myth of the patricidal crime is psychoanalytically true if we think of it as a love story. Freud, for his part, is explicit about the aspect of love therein, and if we follow its shocking role, hysterical desire clearly surfaces. Faced in prehistory with the Father as "a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires," those yoked to his self-satisfied omnipotence hated him, but "they loved and admired him, too" (*Totem* 143). Freud maintains across his work that hate is a modality of love, and a beat later, he writes, "[T]he simultaneous existence of love and hate toward the same object lies at the root of many important cultural institutions" (157). Thus, when Freud says the subjected got rid of the Father and "had satisfied their hatred," we can conclude it was not unmixed with love, and when the act "put into effect their wish to identify themselves with him, the affection which had all this time been pushed under was bound to make itself felt" (143). Let us pause here and reflect: this ambivalent identification—an act that abolished the Universal Father, displacing him into castrated particulars yet enshrining his signifier as the One exception—is consistent with the hysteric's fusional wish. As the footnote of this sentence develops, moreover, "[T]he deed cannot have given complete satisfaction to those who did it [. . . ;] it had been done in vain": the wish to take the Father's place failed, and "failure is far more propitious for a moral reaction than satisfaction" (143). Ambivalent primal identification with the Father is root and stem of the hysteric's characteristic dissatisfaction—the impossibility of unity with

the One—and the consequence was the father's displacement, engendering the phallic universe via superegoic institution and the ritualistic habits of the obsessives who maintain it. The hysteric enacted a wish—figured in an impossible demand for love, for the One—whose castrating consequence the obsessive then articulated into a uni-verse, carrying forward and justifying the order. Like the Oedipus Complex, the Primal Father myth is a story of neuroticization.

Leaving aside the question of sexuation for the moment, how does this neuroticization unfold? Both hysterical and obsessive neuroses turn on the Ideal Father, who we've figured as the One, and ambivalence around his exceptional uncastrated status and abusive enjoyment. If the hysteric is there from the beginning of the myth—prior to sexuation, even—one must assume that the passively subjected horde was in the thrall of the One, by which the sexual relation existed, as a protodiscourse without holes, without semblance, without the loss of jouissance. A totally mythical prehistory of self-enjoyment predicated on an all-encompassing helpless subjection, the horde's subservience was animalistic in the strict sense of without speech. Then, not unlike the way the infant object becomes a subject, the hysteric ambivalently spoke, saying the previously unsayable, engendering the Other through castration, a Law that separates desire from its pained and pleasurable enjoyment (jouissance). This primal repression of a mythic satisfaction gave way to desire's endless articulation in, through, and impossibly beyond discourse. Through speaking, the hysteric births the phallic signifier of lack whose effect is the gestalt image of the symbolic Phallus—the lost Whole One reduced to the signifier of self-mastery (S_1)—engendering the phallic jouissance of the speaking being.[26] A loss in the Other is incurred through speaking, which amounts to a refusal of this subjection to absolute bodily jouissance: the inaugurating speech act of the hysteric that institutes history is "situated at this point where discourse emerges, or even, when it returns there, where it falters, in the environs of *jouissance*" (*Other* 71).[27] Thus, where there was jouissance, there is discourse, the social bond, and as we've seen, where there is the social bond, there was the hysteric's striking speech act. Hysteria is the *conditio sine qua non* of society and history.

The hysteric's inaugural speech act is a strike that unmasks yet institutes the symbolic—by bringing the Other and the One into a semblance of ex-sistence—but what is the obsessive's role? It's as Freud says: the brothers elaborate the meaning of the hysterical strike into a proper order to guarantee the existence of the Other and to mask the lack at its heart, the lost object, and jouissance. No doubt, in Freud's myth, this is imagined

as a defense of patriarchal prerogative—predicated on the objectification of women, defined as objects for trafficking—but more formally, it is an obsessive move to guarantee the symbolic order, to hold fast to the *semblance* of having the phallus. But is it not clear, then, that this patriarchally ordered "objective" sexuation is itself part of the obsessive's semblance of order? Hysterics and obsessives are not, respectively, women and men. Far more plausible, if uncanny, is the view that the brothers were—through an act of mass hysteria—sisters brought together in a collective act to throw off their subjection. In this way, obsessive neurosis is simply a modality of hysteria (after all, the obsessive is not allotted their own discourse by Lacan). As would-be masters of the phallic universe, masculine obsessives might be prone to a defense of patriarchs in order to guarantee the semblance of their object, but it is not their ineluctable expression. Hystericization is, indeed, the very psychoanalytic process to which an obsessive is subjected by throwing into question their well-maintained symbolic order.[28]

Hysteria is, thus, not simply the condition for the symbolic order; it is the means of its traversal. Paradoxically, however, it is through a protesting discourse that the hysteric wishes to unite into One, so their cure, in turn, entails separation from the Other.[29] Whereas the obsessive produces a fantasy of being "in relation to the object that has been lost," the hysteric imagines themself as "the object that the Other is missing" (Gessert, "Hysteria" 63). In either case, the hysteric appeals to the obsessive and vice versa to cure their want-to-be, and each strategy is meant to defend against "recognizing that loss is constitutive of the subject and that it is neither inflicted by, nor can it be resolved by, the Other" (66). The obsessive and the hysteric are siblings divided in neurosis yet united in the common cause of articulating the object *a* beyond objectification, an indeterminate articulation of what is not-all in the symbolic that, in turn, traverses the fantasy of the Other's and the One's ex-sistence. The indetermination of the object *a* is, therefore, transformative, and its articulation works at the very limits of the symbolic order. Here, psychoanalytic practice and social transformation are coordinate through the sororal bond—half-said truth's sisterly relation to jouissance—between obsessives and hysterics.

When discussing brotherhood, Lacan admits, "I am not a man of the left" and then states, "I know of only one single origin of brotherhood [. . .] segregation" (*Other* 112). What segregates us? Jouissance, the very thing that alienated the brothers from their father and one another. Whether hysterics or obsessives, as the primal myth demonstrates, neurotic analysands organize barriers "against *jouissance*: repression, subjection to the Law [of

the Other], and the other's demand" (Braunstein 113) and against each other. Compelling the social bond, psychoanalysis urges speech to articulate the lack in the Other, one's want-to-be imbricated with the phallic order. As anyone in analysis knows, we are often in want of this speech. In a word, analytic free association is a kind of impotence, and as Lacan says, "[A]t that level we are all brothers and sisters, and [. . .] one has to extricate oneself as best one can" (*Other* 163). While on the analytic couch, extricating from the other's demand to articulate one's singular desire is the same worthy goal for both hysterics and obsessives. To achieve this separation from the Other in analysis is a kind of freedom.[30] This freedom is "for the obsessional, from the object he tries to hold on to, and for the hysteric, from the desire of the Other on which she depends" (Gessert 67). The obsessive is constantly mistaking their fantasized object for the hysteric who would idealize yet refuse such a conscription, and the hysteric is constantly mistaking the uncastrated master for the obsessive who they would identify with but are not. In these failures, where discourse never stops emerging and jouissance looms, the segregating wall between neurotics becomes reinforced. As Soler has put it, the end of analysis is when neurotics "stop asking the Other to resolve [their] castration" (qtd. in Gessert 66), and my contention is that this can be an express end of social organization, too.

Politics is a way to traverse that wall of jouissance and segregation, and it amounts to learning to love, through the fictional libidinal ties that make up and sustain social groups. This, in turn, depends on organizing a less oppressively neurotic social-symbolic order—always fictional, in the final analysis—that leaves a little more room for desire's indeterminate articulation, whether on the analytic couch or otherwise. Lacan spoke of a wall of language that inscribes itself between people and in the symptomatic inhibitions of the body—the jouissance of the inarticulate body—that form a protective and egoic defense. That wall is not unlike the bar between signifier and signified, and it's quite remarkable that Lacan calls love a "sign" (*On Feminine* 17). He thereby suggests that, even as a semblance, love is speech that scales the wall, love is mutual where jouissance is not. Instead of the wall—talking to walls and running headlong into the place where signification fails—love is a semblance of a sign that overcomes bodily jouissance and the wall of language that responds to it and segregates. This answer constituted by jouissance is not necessary, Lacan says, but the demand of love is: Love is a sign that cures, but as giving what you don't have, it does not cure the other's want-to-be. Love does not cure castration absolutely. Like the Word, it is both a wound and its treatment. Love is the originary act

of signification, which sets us apart, yet speech aims impossibly to unify us, despite our impotence before jouissance. This is the hystory of the primal myth, a love story that inscribes the origins of language, segregation, and the social bond. The fathers of psychoanalysis—Freud, the obsessive, and Lacan, the hysteric[31]—each have passed down their respective discourses on love and their myths, too. When read together, they form a pair of siblings under the sign of psychoanalysis, a discourse that does not stop writing itself. Perhaps as siblings, we can forge the necessary bonds by learning to strike and love in equal measure through an inarticulate and indeterminate solidarity—to realize what collective power that might bring.

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Notes

1 For a robust summary of this conjuncture as it unfolded, see esp. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis* and "Introduction I"; and Rose, "Introduction II." For a shorter treatment with a different view, Lasch. See also Chodorow; and Dinnerstein.

2 Lévi-Strauss made a fine distinction when it comes to myth and language: "There is a very good reason why myth cannot simply be treated as language if its specific problems are to be solved; myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech" (430). In his return to Freud's primal myth, Lacan is not simply finding a new way to write the myth in a logical form, irrespective of speech; he is, by implication, narrativizing the origins of language and its concomitant effects—castration, hominization, curative speech, and so on—in a way that isn't simply telling a myth about myth, or what amounts to the same thing, a myth about language. Further, by bringing sexual difference and love into this retelling, he is finding a way to redescribe Aristophanes's myth from Plato's *Symposium*, a story Freud drew on to offer substance to his mythic war between Eros and Thanatos. A longer demonstration would take us too afield; I will pursue it elsewhere.

3 See Chiesa xi–xxiii for a fuller summation of the eponymous argument.

4 See Lacan's fuller criticism of such analysts: "I'm saying this for the analysts as a whole, those who dawdle, those who spin around, mired in Oedipal relations on the side of the Father. When they can't get out of this, when they can't move beyond what happens on the side of the Father, it has a very precise cause. It's that the subject would have to admit that the essence of woman is not castration" (. . . *or Worse* 35).

5 In a discussion of the Book of Hosea, some version of this was first introduced in Seminar XVII, but the more complete discussion is found in Seminar XIX, particularly in the session, "The Founding of Sexual Difference."

6 The synonymous substitution of sexual nonrelation for social nonrelation is most fully argued by Tomšič: "The notion of class

struggle replaces the old, inadequate questions and answers, the social or the economic contract, with a new, radicalised problem: rather than being backed by some mythical contract, convention or relation, society rests on an irreducible struggle and social nonrelation. Capitalism exploits this nonrelation, but it can do so only under the condition of mystifying the actual source of wealth with a multitude of ideological fictions, fantasies and fetishisations" (97). See ch. 2 of *The Capitalist Unconscious* for Tomšič's full Freudian-Lacanian revision of the notion of class struggle.

7 I emphasize the comedy of social relations—the burlesque of misunderstanding—as Lacan often does, because in *Television*, he equates psychoanalysts with the comedy of tragic saints. This is not because they are charitable or care more, but because "[s/]he acts as trash": the analyst allows the analysand to take them as the refused and inarticulable cause of desire by inviting the analysand to freely associate and treat them however they unconsciously want in order to articulate the cause of their desire, providing rare grace in social relations. The artifice of such one-sided talk is, at least from the outside, a funny misunderstanding: a case of the analyst's mistaken identity as a saint or, more likely, a demon the analysand wishes to exorcise. Lacan paradoxically equates this ostensibly religious discourse with the way out of capitalism: "The more saints, the more laughter; that's my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse—which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some" (16). That said, the interminability of psychoanalysis remains. Thus, Lacan says, in Seminar XVII: "Don't expect anything more subversive in my discourse than that I do not claim to have a solution" (*Other* 70). Whether this lack of a solution applies to capitalist relations or social relations *tout court* is perhaps an open question.

8 As Lacan points out in Seminar XX, the structured but no less existing possibility of change—of not being bound forever in one discourse—is due to love: "I am not saying anything else when I say that love is the sign that one is changing discourses" (*On Feminine* 16).

9 Though the everyday run of discourse always admits of some semblance or other, the analytic discourse, as Lacan maintains, holds out the possibility of not being a semblance and is given premium for its ability to rewrite social bonds through the analytic encounter. The analyst, however, is in a tough position if they are to a-void semblance.

10 If the sexual nonrelation cannot be written, it does not stop Lacan from writing it and people invoking it through speech and the "masculine parade" and "feminine masquerade." The sexual relation is for Lacan, then, "what doesn't stop not being written" (*Not-two* 78). In fact, any articulation of sexual relation is, he argues, one of four modes of *failing* to articulate sexual nonrelation—or, what amounts to the same thing, the illogic of sexual difference.

11 As Lacan puts it in Seminar XVII, "Since we have signifiers, we must understand one another, and this is precisely why we don't understand one another. Signifiers are not made for sexual relations. Once the human being is speaking, it's stuffed, it's the end of this perfection, this harmony, in copulation" (*Other* 33).

12 See Tomšič, esp. ch. 4, for a fuller exposition of these interpretations.

13 As Fink points out, a hysteric and their discourse are distinct but homologous: "Let me point out that, while Lacan terms one of his discourses the 'hysteric's discourse,' he does not mean thereby that a given hysteric always and inescapably adopts or functions within the hysteric's discourse. As an analyst, the hysteric may function within the analyst's discourse; as an academic, the hysteric may function within the discourse of the university" ("Discourses" 30).

14 For his part, Žižek has compellingly demonstrated how the object *a* gets metabolized by capitalism via the university discourse so that the capitalist system can sustain itself. "Can the upper level of Lacan's formula of the university discourse—S2 directed toward *a*—not also be read as standing for the university knowledge endeavoring to integrate, domesticate, and appropriate the excess that resists and rejects it?" ("Social Links" 107). The hysteric's truth, in other words, feeds the system through her rejection of it—a cautionary tale.

15 I mean interpretation in the particular way Lacan suggests in Seminar XIX: "I will specify that the analyst is on no account a nominalist. He does not think of his subject's representations. Rather, he has to intervene in his discourse by procuring for him *un supplément designifiant*, an additional signifier. This is what is called interpretation" (. . . *or Worse* 134). The additional signifier is the analysand's master signifier. This squares with Fink's statement: "In this way, the analyst sets the patient to work, to associate, and the product of that laborious association is a new master signifier. The patient in a sense 'coughs up' a master signifier that has not yet been brought into relation with any other signifier."

16 Chiesa puts this well when he says, "[T]he hysteric knows a lot about the master's impotence, but, in turn, this very knowledge renders her impotent, that is, prevents her from accepting herself as the object of his (loss of) *jouissance*" (149).

17 To be sure, in 1933, Lacan had proposed this thesis, but there is arguably no way to sustain it after 1970. For the clinical and theoretical implications of the idea, see Verhaeghe's *New Studies*, and for the historical and political consequences, see Robcis.

18 Instead of citing well-known defenses for the symbolic decline of paternal authority, see the discussion between Žižek, Maria Aristodemou, Stephen Frosh, Derek Hook, and Lisa Baraitser in which Žižek's discourse on the paternal decline thesis is duly hystericized. Indeed, he produces, like any good hysteric, the knowledge and flagship premise of this paper: "This is why, for Lacan, hysteria is not a dismissive term. Hysterical discourse is the only productive one. New truth emerges there [. . .]. So the analyst is not productive. The analyst is a purely formal function; all the productivity, all the truth is with the hysteric. Hysteria is the place where something new emerges" (425).

19 In the context of his argument, Žižek is primarily restating the choice between psychosis and neurosis, but then he slides into a discussion of Antigone. This evinces what we are after in this paper: the hysteric is the only possible neurotic position capable of bearing the responsibility of insurrection against the master-signifier and succeeding it by helping society

collectively succeed the institutions they represent.

20 In "Unbehagen and the Subject," the interview mentioned above, Žižek, too, appears to be in solidarity with this wager for an authentic collectivity precisely at the limits of political thinking in Lacan's discourse: "I claim that Lacan, towards the end, was approaching this when he struggled with the problems of political organization[.] [W]hen we have community, collective, what I call public space, a certain collectivity is established. To put it in very simplistic, Lacanian terms, the [psychoanalytic] field is not organized through a master-signifier, we just relate directly to *object a*, *object a* as the cause. I naively believe there are, in things like theoretical communities today—other collectives, where I do get some kind of authentic collectivity. This is my wager" (424).

21 For a longer conversation on the differences between horizontal and vertical identification and solidarity in Freud's work, see Read and Gilbert.

22 As Soler characterizes this crisis and ensuing impasse, perhaps rather ungenerously, by way of Dora's case study, "What happens when the hysteric has a problem? She talks about it with a lot of people who then talk among themselves. Immediately a collective problem is created. The hysteric maneuvers. Take Dora, for example. It is clear that Dora manipulated her entire little world. The typical obsessive, on the other hand, is a man who stays in his study and thinks about his problem all by himself" (262).

23 See Chiesa's fuller summary of this section's argument 128–45.

24 In Seminar XX, Lacan redoubles his previous discourse on the object *a* with the "barred Other," which we will return to later: "[T]he locus of the Other was symbolized by the letter A. [. . .] I marked it by redoubling it with the S that means signifier here, signifier of A insofar as the latter is barred: S(A). I thereby added a dimension to A's locus, showing that qua locus it does not hold up, that there is a fault, hole, or loss therein. Object *a* comes to function with respect to that loss. That is something which is quite essential to the function of language" (28).

25 Speaking of the ends of analysis, Verhaeghe sums this up: "The important thing about the divided subject is that it has no essence, no ontological substance, but, on the contrary, comes down to a pre-ontological, indeterminate non-being which can only give rise to an identity, an ego, in retrospect [. . .]. The identification with a number of signifiers, coming from the Other, presents us with the ego. The subject, on the contrary, is never realised as such; it joins the pre-ontological status of the unconscious, the unborn, non-realised, etc." ("Causation" 178).

26 With the additional emphasis on the hysteric's role, this abridged ontogenetic account follows, more or less, the one offered by Braunstein.

27 For a longer account of the jouissance's imbrication with the origins of the social bond, see Sauret: "[G]uilt, desire, anxiety, aggressiveness and violence show us that human community does not exist without discontents. [. . .] Subjects try to defend themselves against this malaise through their love for their counterparts" (40).

28 As Fink puts it, "[T]he obsessive must be hystericized at the outset

and throughout the course of his analysis" (133).

29 Thus, Fink marks a distinction in technique for the hysteric: "[T]he hysteric must be made to change discourses and stop expecting or waiting to receive knowledge from the Other" (*Clinical* 133). We can see that this means, for the hysteric, exiting their long journey through the institutions—the master and university—by taking their discourse of desire to the analyst's couch to traverse their separation from the Other. The obsessive, we could say, has the additional move of hystericization before meeting up with the hysteric's analytic task.

30 To achieve this freedom in the consulting room, the analyst tries to situate themselves in the position of *object a*, if only its semblance, to keep the analysand freely associating. The psychoanalytic act moves the subject beyond neurosis: "free from the weight of the Other," as Fink puts it (*Lacanian Subject* 66). This freedom, as Lacan had already stated in "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," is not before but after the letter. Freedom is a freedom through discourse and the imaginary transference of the analysand and analyst: "[H]e comes to us [. . .] this being of nothingness, for whom, in our daily task, we clear anew the path to his meaning in a discreet fraternity—a fraternity to which we never measure up" (101).

31 As quoted and translated by Gherovici, Lacan says so himself: "All things considered, I am the perfect hysteric, that is, one without symptoms, aside from an occasional gender error. [. . .] The difference between a hysteric and myself (because of the fact that I have an unconscious, I let it merge with my consciousness) is that the hysteric is sustained in her cudgel's shape by an armour (which is distinct from her consciousness) and that is her love for her father" (67).

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