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Solitude: Common Some Political Drifts in Lacan's Teaching

“What speaks is just about solitude...”

Encore Seminar, Jacques Lacan

Paradoxical solitude

We have chosen these two terms, solitude: common, separated in this case by a colon, which implies a relationship of conjunction and disjunction between the two terms, or a ‘sameness’ in the difference. From this solitude: common formula, in the present essay we will present the possible relationships between the analytic discourse elaborated by Jacques Lacan and the political thinking that may eventually rise from it.

The term solitude comes directly from Lacan's teaching, since he uses it, although on few occasions, to make reference to the solitude of the subject within its empty constitution. The Lacanian subject emerges as emptiness, without substance and without the possibility of being represented in its totality by the signifiers that establish it. Its solitude is radical, as long as no ‘intersubjective’ or ‘loving’ relationship can definitely eliminate that empty and exceptional space. This empty space is assigned to be filled with those signifiers that represent, identify, or fix it in accordance with certain ideals or mandates, according to different operations. At the same time, this subject without substance, empty in its essence, is also called on to imagine a possible completeness through different fantasy strategies that are more determinately aimed at veiling that structural emptiness. Nonetheless, this subject we are speaking about here, the Lacanian subject, is unthinkable without its relationship to the Other that logically precedes it. The solitude of the subject does not come from a solipsism in which it is able to found itself through a reflexive act that positions itself before the world. It is not a solitude which comes from any potency that the subject itself may have to constitute. Its solitude, on the contrary, results from the fact that even though the subject is constituted in the Other's field, its mode of emergency is

27

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such that it is impossible that it can establish a stable, definite, common quality-based relationship, with the Other symbolic-partner that actually constitutes it. The Lacanian subject's solitude is equivalent to its structural dependence in relation to the place of the Other which does not allow for the establishment of a common ontological foundation. Even though the subject's life stands in its existential orientation as devoted to the Other, supported by the Other, opposed to the Other, rejected by the Other, loved by the Other, claimed by the Other, desired, humiliated, etc., these different positions always belong to a fantasy order that inscribes itself in an ontological gap constituted by the absence of relationship.

In contrast, the classic term 'common' does not arise in Lacan's teaching, not even in a metaphorical way. The 'common', as termed by Negri and Hardt, has in general, in most authors, an ontological origin with a deep Deleuzian mark. When talking about the 'common', Negri refers to a potency which is unlimited, cognitive, affectionate, which refers to intellectual work, and is singular, in the sense that it is transversal to the particular-universal relationship. This singularity reaches its extreme when it is seen as being able to 'produce' a different subjectivity from that deployed under the merchandise form in a capitalist production mode.

From a Lacanian point of view, it must be clarified from the outset that terms such as 'production', 'potency', 'life', terms that come from the so-called 'desiring-production of the Deleuzian field', constitute an 'oblivion', a rejection of the ontological dimension of the emptiness of the subject, in its paradoxical solitary constitution in relation to the Other. That is why we are obliged in this text to find for this term 'common' a Lacanian logic, different from the one established in Negri's Deleuzian construction. In the Lacanian 'common' that we seek to deal with here, the gap, the ontological hiatus, should manifest itself in all its consequences. There is no potency, no production, no life that is not interrupted by the 'cause' of this ontological fracture.

Yet in trying to cope with these two terms, we find in the relationship between them a privileged way of articulating the singular condition of the subject and the collective dimension of politics. To say it in a slightly Heideggerian way, 'common' and 'solitude' refer to and name the same ontological hiatus, the

same irreducible gap, and come from the same signifier matrix in which they constitute each other.

Not knowing and collective experience

Lacan cannot be more explicit regarding solitude. In the *Encore Seminar*, once the logical impossibility of the sexual relationship has been established, he states that the only thing that is ‘effectively written’ in the speaking being is solitude. Perhaps that is the reason why he claimed with his known sarcasm that he was not lacking reasons to laugh, but someone to share it with. Without a shadow of a doubt, this statement about the radically solitary character of he who talks at his own risk presents one of the typical tensions that traverses the psychoanalysis and politics relationship. Namely, as we have already formulated, on the one hand, a strictly singular character, in solitude and without possible equivalents, of the advent of the subject to a speaking, sexed, and mortal existence; and, on the other hand, as Lacan himself presents it, this singularity can only become intelligible in a collective logic that he develops using different names throughout his teaching. From the already mentioned Other’s field that, as is known, always refers to a symbolic order, to his theory of discourses, where each of them always presents a particular structure according to their own conditions of emergence, since within them such heterogeneous elements as signifiers and drives co-imply one another in a paradoxical logic. At the same time, this structure is transindividual as it never arises from the reflexive act of an already established consciousness, due to the constitutive potency of Master signifiers, identifications, the ideals of a person, and super-ego instances, which assume a ‘collective’ form, as long as we understand ‘collective’ not as a quantity phenomenon, but as the matrix from which social bonds are constituted. Finally, all these issues may be summed up in the following statement: the first emergence of the subject is always within the so-called ‘Master’s discourse’. Although, regarding the ‘Master’s discourse’, we must assume that, in its contemporary forms, this discourse, which has always been supported under the insignia of permanence, lineages, time and duration, in short, symbolic heritage, at present sees itself badly eroded, volatilized, by the incessant corrosion of the unlimited circulation of merchandise. This, however, does not prevent the fact that the so called ‘Master signifiers’ still preserve their symbolic efficiency.

It is true that whenever Lacan talks about the position of the analyst in the act that implicates him in the cure, he refers in different ways to this solitude here evoked. Thus, to introduce solitude, or the solitary character of existence when bringing the unconscious into play in the experience of the cure, can be seen as the best way to address the problem that emerges when psychoanalysis is confronted with the experience of the collective that politics always implies.

The analysis, in the completion of the cure, radicalizes the experience of solitude, as long as the subject manages to drift apart from the Master signifier, which constitutes the logical matrix of its identifications. This separation – which cannot be just considered as an erasure – allows the subject, at the same time, an unprecedented distance, a perspective in ‘anamorphosis’ on what is its own fantasy, which is always saturated with the constitutive potency of the Other’s figures.

In this way, the subject in the experience of the end of analysis subverts the identifications that both dominated the it and abandon it to its surplus jouissance. An example of this crossroads between solitude and the collective which Lacan himself faced would then be the following: how the end of the analysis would be articulated, an experience that is far away from an identification, with a collective construction of a School that would in no way present a space where the more inert and sedimented identities that are always promoted by the life of the institution itself would once more return. We should remember that Lacan had assumed as his own political challenge, as a cause that emerged from his own relationship with the experience in psychoanalysis, that the School would constitute itself as a collective experience that would not be dominated by the identifications supported by the Master signifier.

30

For the same reason, Jacques Lacan’s School, defined by him as a basis of operations for the ‘discontents in civilization’, faces from the beginning the following questions:

How is a subject that has succeeded in distancing itself from identifications incorporated into a collective instance?

Does the collective exist outside its own reference to the Master signifier?

What is a group constituted by subjects who in a contingent way have traversed the level of identification?

How is belonging organized away from identification and, therefore, from that which Freud called ‘mass psychology’?

These questions refer to a problematic and difficult distinction between the collective relationship with the cause and the ideal. Whereas the cause is the empty place from which the common can eventually be brought about in a contingent and retroactive way, the ideal is always an agglutination in masses that seals the invention of the political act of enunciation. It was precisely this problem that obliged Lacan to distinguish his School from analytic societies, as the latter are inevitably supported by the logics of identification.

The ‘price’, if we are allowed this expression, which Lacan had to pay for conceiving a School that would work against the tide of identifications, was to conceive it as an inconsistent group, such as ‘not-all’, a concept that Lacan elaborated starting with the 20th Seminar, i.e. at the juncture when his ‘logic of sexuation’ was presented. Unlike a society ruled from its own centre by a knowledge capable of defining what a standard analyst is, that is, an analyst for all cases, Lacan states that his School is centred around an emptiness, a ‘not knowing’ that must be preserved by means of the School’s procedures, which should never erase or fulfil it definitely. When this emptiness is not localized in an appropriate way, its confusion with ‘nothingness’ and, finally, with ‘nullity’ arises. This explains, according to Lacan, why on many occasions ‘nullities’ are what end up standing at the command of institutions.

Lacan designated this operation as the ‘confusion concerning zero’; that confusion which is established between the non-numerical one of the emptiness marked by the signifier and the zero of quantity. Furthermore and recalling this Lacanian tension between the subject’s solitude and the collective construction of the School, this opens up the access to an example of the way that a transformation of the subject can be conceived and, at the same time, where that transformation can succeed in bringing about a collective, new, and different relationship, with a cause. This new and different relationship with a cause, understood as an emptiness of ‘not knowing’, is what we propose to call ‘common’ in the text here presented. It is effectively a ‘common’ constituted topologi-

cally by a central and, at the same time, external emptiness, a topological figure which Lacan refers to at different moments in his teaching.

This core function of both the emptiness of not-knowing and the possibility of the open and undecidable group of the non-identified, could be a possible starting point which psychoanalysis may offer as a proposal to think the immanent logic of political transformation, even in its emancipatory condition, provided that it is not entirely dominated by the metaphysic of a homogenizing totality.

Some time ago we published a short essay in Argentina: *Para una izquierda lacaniana... (For a Lacanian left...)*. In it we sought, in a conjectural way and in first person through 'ellipses' that appeared everywhere, to present the tension here evoked between psychoanalysis and politics, a tension that, in one's own personal case as in many others, demands a reformulation of the classic approaches of the left.

Although at the beginning we stated, as is shown by means of the ellipsis in the title, that this was a speculation which did not try to found any point of identification in its consistency, that there is not and cannot be a group, institution, or subject that can belong to something that is called the 'Lacanian left'. Nevertheless, the syntagma in question took on a peculiar imaginary consistency and was refuted and rejected as if it were, for some, a new universal foundation of the leftist project; for others, a strategy to settle the left; for some others still, an attempt to turn Lacan into a leftist thinker.

We let keen readers ponder for themselves the unusual fervour of all these reproaches, which were precisely clarified at the beginning of the text. The fact is that the words 'left' and 'Lacanian' are not meant to go together, since they come from fields that keep an insurmountable distance between them and, surely for that reason, the expression inevitably promotes various misunderstandings, which perhaps now reach a greater intensity when we seek to link the word 'solitude' with the word common. But the desire to found any group or current has never existed, nor have we pretended to ignore all that which in Lacan's teaching poses an obstacle to the left's illusions and promises, instead we have tried to make a new punctuation, availability, and opening which work alternatively in different senses. On the one hand, it should undermine usual leftist political stances destabilizing its semantics, still dominated by progressivism, utopia,

and revolution. Progressivism, utopia, and revolution being three representations that in their temporality and spatiality are still ruled by the metaphysics of the totality. In this metaphysics the process of transformation is orientated by an identifying logic that continues to maintain an exclusive relationship with the so-called mass psychology. In view of elucidating this issue, our speculation concerning the ‘Lacanian left’ proposal is an attempt to think of the possibility of a left stream that could have a space in this historic time in which metaphysics has completed its full itinerary.

On the other hand, we have tried to broach, from the perspective of the analytic discourse and its experience of the real, the experience of the common, more precisely, to ask whether there is something in common preceding all the differences generated by traditions and cultural identifications. The common, we insist, is to be seen not as the Deleuzian potentiality, but rather as the contingent response to the ontological hiatus that constitutes all speaking, sexed, and mortal beings in the same way. At the same time, we have tried to renew the question concerning the possibility of a left-wing stance, if reasons such as the following are accepted: the division of the subject is sublation; the surplus jouissance is historically irreducible by any dialectics of overcoming; the labour of repetition of the death drive shatters the illusions of progress of any civilization; the politics and discourse of the Master maintain the will for the working of things; the revolution is the return of the same to the same place – sometimes with deadly consequences; the singularity of jouissance and desire, ultimately, cannot be subsumed under the ‘for all’ of the political thing of the Master.

We could continue to quote other reasons regarding different aspects of Freud’s work and Lacan’s teaching which show us categorically how the so-called arguments of the left are shattered in their ontologically more secure basis when facing the logic of the analytic discourse. At the same time, perhaps these kind of reasons are precisely the ones that would have provoked many Lacanians to abandon paths which have historically been designed by the left, and that philosophers were the ones who would look favourably upon Lacan, in order to renew what in Marxism has still remained unthinkable: subjectivity in its discursive materiality.

If this is the case, why have we preferred the ‘Lacanian left’ formula that returns to the issue of the common, instead of inquiring about the subject’s solitude in any of its usual aspects?

These aspects remind us that we are irreducibly alone when facing the ‘being there’ of our castration and finitude, and that the rest is just illusion. Yet, in spite of these considerations, we can still maintain left-wing ideas, not despite Lacan’s teaching, but owing to several drifts in his teaching that open up the possibility of a conception of post-metaphysical emancipation. We do not state that the paths of this teaching necessarily lead to a leftist stance. In fact, we can see some colleagues who, based on Lacanian arguments, have built a sceptical perception in politics, or a lucid conservatism, or an ironical and diagonal reading of political phenomena. Thus, it is necessary to specify that, despite everything, relevant moments of the Lacanian itinerary form a resonance box promising to resound again, in all their modulation, the issues of the left. For that, we will present different aspects.

First of all, we claim that Marxism, as a desire, found a place in Lacan’s teaching on mourning, starting from the assumption that outside the home is where mourning can be truly accomplished, and that this home can only be the unique 20th century materialist theory urging us to continue to think of a practice that would work on the impossible real. Obviously, we are referring to Lacan’s teaching. But, from this perspective, it is necessary to insist that the work of this mourning must have as a condition of possibility that the psychoanalysis-politics relationship, their bordering relationships of conjunction and disjunction, cannot be subsumed under the internal movement of philosophy. We do not seek to bring the real under the idea, as Badiou attempts to do, since in so doing, that is, in domesticating the Lacanian real in the guise of a Platonist idea, an attempt is made, by means of a figure of the ‘immortal subject’, as defined by Badiou, a subject, ultimately, ‘faithful to the process of truth’ and thus a guarantor of the entire operation, to dissolve once more the analytic discourse in philosophy. This is particularly true of a philosophical ethics in which, again according to Badiou, only those who are ‘faithful and immortal’ thanks to the articulation of an idea, deserve the name of the subject. In view of this, Badiou’s theoretical project can be seen as a psychoanalysis without psychoanalysis, where this faithful and immortal subject, being already definitely identified with its signifying reality, conceals that it is but a dead subject. It is strange that Badiou,

knowing Lacan, does not realize that such an identity between the Subject and its symbol serves as a gravestone that perpetuates it in its name.

The same can be said of Žižek, who, despite his psychoanalytical readings, always refers them to a pre-Lacanian philosophical problem of an emancipatory logic characterized as a conflict between the universal of reason and a universal embodied by the ‘excluded’, ‘those of the part without part’ – as defined by Rancière – who will always spontaneously know how to organize their counterattack, which is to say, without any political intervention. In both stances, psychoanalysis becomes a guarantor of the philosophical operations and, for the same reason, it cannot become this new field where the process of mourning could be possible. A practice that works with the impossible real, and it is here that our proximity to Ernesto Laclau’s theoretical development can be seen, implies that when the collective field emerges ontologically fractured, in the same conditions that the subject and, thus, hegemonic decisions come to occupy the place of the so called ‘objectivity’ – since they are the only ones which take responsibility for the fractures emerging from the real – the discourse of philosophy has come to its end, not to its historical, datable ending, but to the ending experience concerning the constitution of a new frontier. In this philosophical end, in the space of its intimate exteriority, the political should appear.

At the same time, it should be noted that these objectives are maintained without any ground, in the classical sense of the term. Lacan cannot be the new ground for the left; on the contrary, he is its ‘disfoundation’ or, if you will, the demonstration that only the absent cause is really operative, never as a previously established option of knowing, but retroactively set by the series of events. It consists in a wager without the Other of the guarantee, yet leads us to neither Rorty’s ironical relativism, nor to the historicist constructivism of Foucaultian inspiration. The ontological gap, Lacan’s ‘crossed ontology’, renders possible a series of logical operations with the ‘half saying’ of truth, which work as ‘contingent foundations’ or as ‘quasi transcendental’, allowing for the beginning of a far-reaching intelligibility. It does not consist in presenting a compact and consistent narrative, since this is structurally incompatible with the real put into play in the operation. We may point out, however, that all the logical, topological, and rhetorical conditions are present, to account for how speaking, sexed, and mortal existence is, within its own constitution, a political fact susceptible to being inscribed in a will of transformation.

To refer to this inscription of the subject in a transforming will, it is inevitable to briefly mention the famous historical issue called ‘voluntary servitude’.

Throughout these five centuries, this voluntary servitude presented by La Boétie has been reformulated in different ways, with different theoretical strategies, and pointing at different political problems. In any case, one thing is true: so-called emancipation can be better imagined if it involves an ‘external oppression’, since in such circumstances a force that seems external and alien prevents the subject from realizing its own essence. We know that throughout the centuries this modulated, with variations, the semantics of emancipation, namely, the liberation of a so-called force oppressed by the dominating interests. But what happens if one admits that, for various reasons, the oppression is not just external, that the Master is supported by the investment of the submissive and, yet, one does not want to give emancipation, justice, or equality up? The recourse to naïve belief in the emancipatory project does not make sense any longer; emancipation demands to be reinvented with what we already know of the subject and its relationship with the real. Here we have a typical problem of what we consider to be, in a speculative way, the ‘Lacanian left’. In this sense, for us, the very expression ‘will’ is problematic. What is a will that is different from that which has been put into play in totalitarian projects? What are the conditions to think of a will that has gained supports other than those that have been put to work in the sacrificial voluntarism of the left and in the heroic decisionism of fascist tradition? We should remove the term will from the metaphysics that presided over it in the 20th century and ask about the possibility of the emergence of a collective will, a will that is contingent, not planned in advance, and not inspired by ideals yet capable of breaking with the servitude circuit. This would require that we ask ourselves seriously about what a human collective is capable of or whether it is just devoted to the identifying exaltation. Of course, when we think of will, we do not refer to the critical deliberation which the left of social democratic tradition refers to. Neither do we refer to some great collective act, but rather to an unprecedented series that conveys a new desire, a desire that retroactively invents its cause, because it does not need to have a pre-given reason, in short, a desire that can be recognized in what Lacan in his day called a ‘decided desire’, being a logical support. As is well known, these terms were brought into play by Lacan in reference to the peculiarity of ‘case by case’ logic. It should be noted, however, that the notion of voluntary servitude refers to a collective issue; secondly, we would replace ‘peculiar’ with ‘singular’. The

emergence of a popular will is a singular political experience, and thus ‘universal’, although in Lacanian terms we speak of a fragmented universal, traversed by incompleteness and inconsistency. Taking up the term will, yet interpreted in accordance with the Lacanian logic of ‘decided desire’, we would insist that it is not possible to think of an even partial interruption of voluntary servitude.

A Lacanian Left...

This proposal of a political will that would be grounded in the ‘decided desire’, reveals its true problematic extension if we consider that capitalism is described by Lacan as a circular unending movement, from which we cannot determine an exit point. Furthermore, we can neither name the setting where such exit point may be situated historically, nor that which will come after its consummation. However, capitalism is not an eternal, necessary, quasi-natural reality, where the human condition reaches its final realization step. On the contrary, it is about affirming, once more, its contingency, and so the always possible advent of another way of ‘being with the others’ different from what is known in capitalism. Here lies the historical and unsurpassable tension that presides over the horizon of our political thinking.

Finally, we would like to recall that being leftist is to consider that the exploitation of the labour force carried out under the form of merchandise is an abuse of the absolute difference. It is quite different to accept the disturbing ‘homology’ between the surplus jouissance and the ‘surplus value’, the homology that in the final analysis leads us to think of the strange possibility, as was affirmed by Lacan himself at a certain point, of the fact that ‘the subject is always happy’ from the viewpoint of the solitude of its jouissance, that accepting exploitation as if within itself there were another feature of the necessary and eternal human condition, and, at present, a step away from being ‘founded’ by any cerebral disposition. The hierarchy of the market is not the difference, but a numerical and equivalential tergiversation. The praxis of psychoanalysis can engage in a conversation with the ontological difference only if it is interpreted in political terms. As we have stated before, at the end of philosophy, psychoanalysis and politics can present, in different ways, the logic that responds to the impossible real of the absolute difference.

At this point it is interesting to observe in many contemporary philosophical operations a presentation, on the one hand, of capitalism in its systemic condition, ruled by an unlimited circuit of the merchandise form and, at the same time, once this unlimited and without exterior character of capitalism is presented, the axiomatization of equality and the theoretical configuration of a communist hypothesis are presented to us without the need to account for the internal logical transformation of this passage.

We must insist that if there is an unmistakable specificity in the Lacanian analytical discourse, it is in his constant concern for putting the possibilities and impossibilities of the social links transformation to the test when the real of the surplus jouissance is in play. At the same time, sometimes some psychoanalysts themselves provoke a misunderstanding: since Lacan presented the capitalist discourse as a circular movement without any exterior break, where, in short, the subject gains access to its surplus jouissance without ever encountering any impossibility whatsoever, with this a new version is coined, in this case a Lacanian one, of a Kojévian end of history presented as a totality without an operational exterior, what Kojève together with Bataille would call ‘a terminating negativity’. In some essays Žižek draws inspiration from this view.

Finally, talking about solitude today requires that we remember that although the discourse of the Master in its contemporary guise presents the fissures in its historical foundations that once served as semblance, it nevertheless preserves its function, that of concealing and veiling the singularity of the subject. By contrast, the subject in the radical solitude of the *sinthome* in the cure can invent another way of reading or interpreting the ‘for all’ that supports the world. And this is what we can consider as a political fact, in the more radical sense of the term, which is a way of stating that, regarding other theoretical stances of the provisionally called ‘Lacanian left’, our point of view is that what is more radical in Lacan’s teaching as regards political thinking lies in his elucidation of the experience of the cure and within the logical construction of his School.

38

Common

What is the common, if the starting point is not the ‘for all’ that aims at an ideal point, a final point, utopian, without fractures or antagonisms, an order of a society reconciled with itself, as was believed historically by the classical left?

What is the common, if it is considered as that that emerges from the ‘there is no sexual relationship’, the common arising from the *sinthomatic* solitude that results from the unconscious, without dialectics or any overcoming? In other words, the common as the term where the absolute difference can come into play?

From this perspective, the names of the common come from the ‘there is not’: there is no sexual relationship, no metalanguage, no Other of the Other. At the same time, these three ‘there is not’ signal that a certain civilization, the capitalist one in this case, is not supported just by violent and exterior oppression, but also by the complicity of the subject in its fantasized and ideological response to the different ‘there is not’. Moreover, the ideology is the ‘fantasy’ outside the analytic experience. Social life is ruled by the fantasized response to these three ‘there is not’ that speaking beings have in common. We propose, by contrast, to think of the common from the ‘there is no’ logic in order to open up a new possibility for the enigmatic ‘being with the others’ which, in his day, Heidegger left and replaced with the expression *people*, a romantic expression in his case, which always pretends to present itself as a fixed and stable identity, and which recently Laclau has re-established in its logical dignity since he considers the people as a hegemonic invention-construction produced through different discursive operations.

Marx himself refused to think of the common because it supposed an already established assumption called ‘community’. It is in Lacan’s teaching, from the *sinthomatic* solitude, as that which is already inscribed in the ‘no relationship’, that we have the opportunity to understand the common from a new perspective. The common without an identitary basis, distinct from the homogenizing characteristics of capitalism, preceding all divisions of labour or bourgeois hierarchies, irreducible to any utilitarian calculation of the semblances. Our common is what we can do together with the emptiness of that ‘there is not’. It is neither the characteristic that unifies us, nor the potentiality that constitutes us; the common is the singular of the *sinthome*, the solitude that invents the social link so that it becomes a political will. But the common considered in these new terms requires certain precisions:

- a) If Freud has always seen ‘mass psychology’ as a prolegomenon of totalitarianism, Lacan, by contrast, seeks to isolate a perspective of the common

which may be differentiated from the capitalist or totalitarian ‘for all’. A being together, a being with the others, in a project without guarantees, where the common is not already given but is rather conceived in terms of a contingency that can be found in art, in love, in friendship, and in the specifically political order. We should remember that this experience of the common is possible when the *sinthome* of each of us names the radical and singular solitude of the subject at the point at which it distances itself from the Other’s figures. What is important to note here is that when facing the impossibility of the sexual relationship, there is no attempt here to consider love as a simple veil concealing this impossibility. This is because, according to Lacan, the requirement of something true is always put into play whenever we deal with impossibility. The contingency that is capable to temporarily erase impossibility must have the dignity of an experience of transformation; and love, for Lacan, is situated within this perspective.

What, then, is the only material evidence of this matrix of the common with which speaking beings have been connected? The materiality of the common comes from the link between the real with *lalangue*. There is no other matrix of the common than that event which precedes the differences between what is taught and what is learned, between those who work and those who give orders, have been established, before grammar has been learned and good or bad schools been entered, and also precedes the ‘general intellect’ of Marxist reference, which is evoked by Italian philosophers.

The solitary encounter with the real of *lalangue*, the first trauma, is paradoxically the only point that presents the existence of the common as that which escapes the homogenizing ‘for all’ of ‘mass psychology’. For this reason, this solitary encounter with the common of *lalangue* cannot be subsumed under either individualism or under the so-called private sphere. In fact, it constitutes the vanishing point of those spheres, the point of their deconstruction. Perhaps, for these reasons, linguists and logicians who have been courageous enough to discern what is put into play in the first encounter with *lalangue* have never wished to abandon the project of emancipation, even when the latter appears to be shattered in its foundations and supported solely by its absent cause. Thus, the emancipatory narrative demands, and in this it follows the analytic discourse, that the common manifests itself not only in its incompleteness (belonging to the masculine logic), but also in its inconsis-

ency (the sphere defined by the feminine logic). There cannot be a compact emancipatory narrative that seeks to erase the specific interruptions of the ontological hiatus and the contingent manifestation of impossibility.

b) Sexed and mortal speaking existence belongs, in first place, to the not-all of the common and not to the universal, which is always supported by an exception. Being African, Arabian, Latin-American, belongs to the universal, which is always already a second derivation with respect to the first belonging of the *speaking* being to the common of *lalangue*. This is what, to our mind, Lacan clearly sensed: what the excluded mass is deprived of is the possibility of transforming the traumatic, *sinthomatic*, and solitary encounter with *lalangue* into a social bond.

In a certain way, the subject can be included in a collective transformation process when perceiving that it is something more than its own identifications and, in so doing, it also faces, finally, its responsibility for the way of living in *lalangue*.

The Not-All

Based on what has been developed thus far, namely, by translating the issue of solitude and ‘non relationship’ into the field of the common, we can suggest the following:

a) The contemporary Master discourse nourishes the ‘for all’ with a mercantile individualism that permeates the State itself, and only leaves a ‘sub-development’ piled up in its surplus jouissance for the excluded. Thus, this ‘for all’ might be thought of as a fracture. Although the Master discourse’s aim is, ultimately, that the ‘everything works’, it cannot break free from the antagonisms constitutive of the political. This constitutive antagonism results from the division of the subject itself, a division between the *sinthomatic* common of *lalangue* and the figures that tie us to its Master signifiers. From such a perspective we can claim that the political arises from the real encounter with *lalangue*, whereas politics is to be considered as a ‘know how’, yet one that implies this encounter. In the encounter of the real with *lalangue*, the ‘for-all’ is rendered incomplete and thus becomes inconsistent. These are the moments when the experience of the common may let political invention occur.

b) But this political invention must still recognize the present metamorphosis of the poverty conditions within the logic of the contemporary capitalist discourse. Namely: poverty is not just the deprivation of ‘material needs’, as Marx thought, but consists in being alone with the surplus jouissance and confronting the eclipse of the symbolic. If poverty was previously characterized as a minus, a lack, at present, from the perspective of the surplus jouissance and its objects, it is considered to be a place of the excess and condensation of jouissance, call it drugs, weapons, games, etc. What characterizes the contemporary poverty of the capitalist discourse, is, ultimately, the poverty of the consumer, even an excessive consumer, because the consumer is the one who has been deprived of everything. Hence, we are not dealing here with the excluded any longer, i.e. those who could only lose their chains, since today, from the viewpoint of the surplus jouissance, there can always be something else to lose. Thus, as has been stated by Ernesto Laclau, the so-called ‘class struggle’ cannot be thought within the domain of its mere endogenous and automatic working; it demands, first of all, consent to reject the terms of exploitation, since it is not an immanent dynamics, but an act capable of inventing a subject outside the strategies of the capitalist exploitation.

c) Pretending to naturalize the exploitation under the pretext that there is no ‘distributive justice’ is, as we have already mentioned, a rejection of the absolute difference. The absence of distributive justice, as Lacan claims, rather implies that within the common a dimension that is irreducible to the calculation of the value will always exist. Perhaps the psychoanalyst may be in charge of protecting this place, since the common is what cannot be exchanged as a value, namely, the *lalangue* in which every speaking being finds his or her *sinthomatic* place.

42

Hence, it can always be suggested that the analyst should avoid expressing an utterance of his/her political or social ideology; in short, he/she should not show off his/her Master signifiers, as this is required by the very logic of the direction of the cure.

Nonetheless, the ‘ideology’ returns in everybody, after even through the use of the Lacanian formulas that, as we have said before, constitute a basis for a new style of lay conservatism or for an ironical adoption of the semblances of tradition. If, however, we seek to act on the real within the cure, the problem

of how the 'absent foundation' becomes a cause must be emphasized once more. Assuming that the 'absent foundation' of the 'non relation' as a cause could constitute the condition for a School considered as an 'operational base of the discontents of civilization', a solution formulated by Lacan, appears to be even more daring than the expression 'Lacanian left'.

The rhetorical figures of the saint, the committed warrior, the decided worker, constitute Lacan's various attempts to elaborate what the operation of the subject consists in when it places itself beyond the level of identifications. They are *sinthomatic* names of the 'being there' in political action.

At the same time, we will insist that this beyond is always grounded in a 'not-all' logic, which, even when Lacan formulates it as if it belonged to the feminine, should not be mixed up with any kind of gender identity.

Whereas both the logic of the all and of the masculine exception always call for the restoration of a new Master signifier that guarantees the order of the 'for-all', the 'not-all', which could account for the emancipatory moment, constitutes itself in a relationship with the others that only retroactively, after the contingent invention of a new limit, gives us its true transformative reach.

d) The left cannot be utopian since the emergence of the analytic discourse, as there will never be a constituent reconciled with itself and without fractures. It cannot be revolutionary, since there is no break that would allow for everything to start again, if such an event occurred eventually, it can only be considered as a sign of the efficacy of the death drive, and since it cannot be progressist, its time will be that of the 'future anterior': 'what I will have been, for what I am going to be'. Dealing with the return of the past without nostalgia and with the energy of what is coming: is not this the war waged against desire?

So in order to finish with this thorny question, knowing that there are still many interesting readings related to the final part of Lacan's teaching, we will allow ourselves a quasi-ontological digression that will bring together the previous aspects of our elaboration in all its complexity.

In Lacan's teaching, the common never appears as an immutable essence, it always emerges from 'there is not', it has no other solution other than appearing either as the 'all' and the 'exception in the masculine logic' or as the 'feminine not-all'. In this sense, the common emerges from an ontology of a one which is always fractured, failed, as Laclau would say. The common we are dealing with here cannot be supported axiomatically by means of the simple communist hypothesis whereby 'every speaking being is the same as any other speaking being', as that hypothesis demands, in order to be proposed at all, a reference to the totality under its axiomatic form. The *sinthomatic* common, the common such as solitude presented until now, is originally exposed to the vicissitudes of the differences between the all, the exception, and the not-all. These logical modalities, as is known, were elaborated by Lacan as a response to the impossibility of the sexual relationship, and are known as the formulas of sexuation.

The masculine 'for-all' is not equality, because it is a universal that is supported by a radical exclusion that functions as a constitutive exception, an exception outside the law that, at the same time, constitutes it for all. From this masculine logic, we can grasp different realities in its phenomenology, which we will illustrate in the following examples: the exceptional tyrant who supports as a limit the bureaucracy of the 'for-all'; the intelligence service outside the rules of the game of the for-all democratic universe; the deadly and obscene superego hidden in the exercise of symbolic law; the hero as a man of exception who condenses, in his singularity, the cause of a mass movement; the lover who, with his law of the heart, proclaims his singularity as a universal law; the proletariat constituting a part of the whole and, at the same time, being the future messiah, the part of those without a part; the new god different from the ontotheological tradition, or the present financial coup in Europe that, in a new state of exception, suspends the democratic rules of the game. These disordered examples in their radical heterogeneity are meant to show why in his day Lacan stated that thought spontaneously and inevitably strives for the 'for-all'. As if it were an iron law of thinking that leads us to grasp, in any discursive reality, a neverending game between the whole/all and the exception. Thus, despite the fact that examples may be quite varied and open, nevertheless they are governed by that logic.

It is clear that if common only manifests itself through these modalities, it is impossible not to have them, and the dream of its elimination is useless and dangerous. Nevertheless, we should continue to wonder about Lacan's last teaching, in which he tried to elaborate his shocking 'woman does not exist' formula as a universal, presenting this difficult and elusive logical modality of not-all, which, on many occasions, is confused and slides spontaneously in its interpretation towards the logic of the incompleteness of the whole/all and the exception.

There is no way of introducing the not-all without its inevitable reference to the whole/all and the exception. Nonetheless, it is in the domain of the not-all that we can think of this enigmatic 'x' of a process of subjectivization of the political that is not, from the outset, limited to the identifications that totalize it.

In the 'not-all', although the subject is referred, from the beginning, to the phallogocentric law that constitutes it, as the formula itself indicates, not all 'x' is governed by the function of the law; this allows us to think of a relationship of the subject with the real outside the law. With this part of the real outside the law, perhaps the subject may put into play an invention of the social link, 'a love without boundaries', as was expressed by Lacan, a new kind of will which is gained neither by the identifications of the ideal of the ego, nor by the deadly circuits of the superego. Since it is about the real outside the law, we cannot deal with this real through the transgression of the law; the transgression is characteristic of the masculine logic of the limit and its crossing. In the unlimited not-all, it is about the contingent invention of a limit that does not proceed from the universal of for-all, but from the common of *lalangue*. This invention takes place each time, through temporary processes, an invention, even minimal, sets a limit which is not foreseen by the programme.

45

Although these reflections may be considered as an irrelevant drift with respect to our attempt to think of the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics, especially the politics which is always driven and besieged through its urgent conditions, it is in our own experience as analysands where we can return to those marks of the determined heritage and legacy that provides us with the only pertinent way of finding the urgent answer.