

# NOT WITHOUT A BANK

On psychoanalysis and/as economy

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What does it matter if the miracle [money] was brought to life by right or by deceit, by trust or by fear! Even those who call it a chimera have to admit that the effect of such a chimera is not lost in reality.

— John Law

In truth, we make reality out of pleasure.

— Jacques Lacan<sup>i</sup>

There are mainly two *economic* arguments against psychoanalysis: the cure is too expensive and it takes too long in time. Are these arguments wrong? It is certainly true that an analytical cure takes a long – and often very long – time. A cure begins the moment you ‘yourself’ are so in a mess that you do no longer recognize yourself in the life you live, i.e. that you are no longer able to be the bearer (the *subjectum*) of that mess. And once in that state, there is no escape for you than going through it, and it certainly takes a long time to do that, i.e. to find yourself back. Therapies that claim they can manage it in a shorter time simply lie. The fact that this lie is commonplace today attests to the deplorable state of the mental health industry.

And what about the other argument? Maybe psychoanalysis really is too expensive. Thirty years ago, when the times were more hospitable to Marxist praxis, I would have called for a ‘psychoanalysis of the people.’ And, indeed, we cannot forget that, in its heydays — thanks to Europe’s mutual reimbursement system — psychoanalysis was relatively inexpensive. Many of today’s psychoanalysts of a certain age have taken advantage from it.

Yet, arguing about the economic side of psychoanalysis, one must not forget that economy is not simply one of its marginal aspects. The entire Freudian theory is thoroughly economic, for it articulates the economy of *pleasure* being the basic paradigm of man’s libidinal household. In order to understand the psychoanalytic pleasure economy, an understanding of economy in the more conventional sense of the word is quite illuminating, if not indispensable. And, vice versa, the understanding of the psychoanalytical pleasure economy can shed interesting light on ‘normal’ economy. It is only by following this road, I shall argue, that psychoanalysis can effectively counter the economic argument against itself and, in turn, provide a cogent economic critique of psychotherapeutic culture.

## PLEASURE ECONOMY, ...

Psychoanalysis has a profoundly economic view of man. In *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Freud presents an initial, more or less complete theory of the psychic apparatus in which the reigning logic is economic.<sup>ii</sup> First he identifies ‘dynamic’ and ‘topical’ points of view, then he identifies an ‘economic’ perspective essential to the correct assessment of the previous two. The whole dynamic of the apparatus and its topical organization are focused on obtaining pleasure. The economy is thus, above all, a pleasure economy. But to what kind of economy does this refer? In no way, for example, does it refer to the notion of housekeeping in classical antiquity or, more specifically, Aristotle’s philosophy; indeed, it is not an *oikonomia* (‘household management’) aimed at the satisfaction of needs and the demands of biological life.

Such is Aristotle’s ‘vitalist’ and ‘essentialist’ understanding of economy. To actualize the ‘organic’ potential of his life, a free man must manage and control his own vital energy as well as the one of his household, his *oikos*. Like all beings, he is an animated body constitutive of an active force (*morfè*) that animates passive material (*hylè*). As a free master, man is the driving force of those who — like his wife, children, and slaves — do not have the freedom to realize their own life potential. By ‘managing’ them he also manages his surroundings and makes his *oikos* an ‘economic’ unit (in the more traditional sense of the word). Together with other ‘free masters,’ he owns the free community, the *polis*, and contributes to the development of its ‘organic’ being and, which amounts to the same thing, its freedom (*autarkeia*).

In Christian Middle Ages, the basic ‘grammar’ to think the relationship between man and God is ruled by the economic paradigm as well. That relation is more precisely ruled by an economy of salvation: within earthly, sinful reality, salvation is virtually present and always potentially capable of being realized.<sup>iii</sup> From Thomas Aquinas onwards, this economy retakes an profoundly Aristotelian logic. Despite the fact that, with the advent of modernity, Aristotelianism became outdated, something of this economy — namely, the orientation toward self-realization — continued to determine the way we conceptualize life. From the nineteenth century onwards, the Darwinian logic to think organic life became dominant. Life’s paradigm of self-preservation was to be considered as a logic of survival, of the survival of the fittest species.

In *Project for a Scientific Psychology* and elsewhere, Freud describes the economy of the psychic apparatus as a ‘pleasure economy,’ but his description does not refer to the vital, ‘organic’ economy outlined above. He does not consider the pleasure ascribed to the psychic apparatus as directly obeying the law of the vital, biological functions. Pleasure is a surplus or side effect, *deconstructing* the operations of the vital functions. Whereas the organism lives on food, the psychic/libidinal apparatus feeds on pleasure, i.e. on the polymorphous ‘perversion’ (‘distortion’, ‘twisting’) of the biological functions. It works thanks to the pleasure that ‘deconstructively’ accompanies eating and other functions of that kind.

Is, then, the psychic apparatus something other than the biological organism? Does Freud identify the psychic apparatus as a entity separate from the body? Something as a ‘soul’? Although this is a common interpretation, particularly in the various humanistic psychologies, it is not the case. The psychic apparatus is a strictly formal function located

‘between the skin and the flesh [*entre cuir et chair*]<sup>iv</sup>. On that locus, the organism respond to stimuli(both exogenous and endogenous) and the principle of that response is (as we know) not simply self-preservation, but ‘pleasure’ as well. The organism reacts on that stimulus which gives the most pleasure – a pleasure which does not necessarily coincide with self-preservation.

So, the extent to which the stimulus generates pleasure determines the way in which they pass through the various layers of the psychic apparatus in order to generate a reaction. One of these layers is the unconscious, the network of representations of past memories and pleasure-generating stimuli (the  $\psi$  system in *Project for a Scientific Psychology* and the Ucs. system in *The Interpretation of Dreams*). Entering stimuli are received first by that unconscious layer. If there, they can be connected to memories of pleasure, they are able to push through to the level of conscious experience and generate a reaction (a ‘*spezifische Aktion*’). It is in that layer of the psychic apparatus — in the domain of unconscious representations and memories — that the pleasure economy operates – an economy that, in contrast to classical economics, does not conform to the logic of the biological functions.

Consider, for example, the case of an endogenous hunger stimulus. The libidinal being processes this stimulus according to the measure of pleasure the reaction to it yields. The stimulus *as such* entails tension and, thus, ‘unpleasure’ (‘*Unlust*’) until the apparatus neutralizes it and produces pleasure (‘*Lust*’). The apparatus does not immediately find that pleasure in eating some food, but in *hallucinating* it – i.e. in a remembered moment of satisfying the feeling of hunger. But such hallucinatory satisfaction removes the ‘unpleasure’ of the stimulus tension only momentarily. Given that it will necessarily reemerge shortly thereafter, the apparatus — under the pressure of what Freud refers to as ‘*Not des Lebens*’ (vital needs, biological functions) — seeks out something in reality to eliminate the prolongation of the stimulus tension and, in so doing, yield longer-lasting pleasure.<sup>v</sup> Within the network of memories/representations, the apparatus will drive the stimulus to that representation which can be connected to some action in reality, to some *spezifische Aktion*. The effect of such an intervention results in the production of pleasure, this time a more consistent one than the initial, hallucinatory one.

The pleasure economy cannot be reduced to the logic vital needs. Although vital needs constitute a necessary precondition, the psychic apparatus has a proper independency. This is why we do not live directly on the level of natural, biological needs. We first of all live on another level, ‘*another scene*’ – ‘*eine andere Schauplatz*’, as Freud tells with an expression barrowed from Fechner.<sup>vi</sup> According to Freud, this other scene, in which Fechner situates the dream, forms the actuality of the unconscious (the Ucs. system), the most important layer of the psychic apparatus. Dominated by the pleasure principle, that layer rules the entire libidinal economy. In other words, the pleasure economy operates in a field of representations (memory traces) which function as ‘reality’ that is disconnected from the reality they refer to. In this sense, the pleasure economy operates in a field of ‘fictions,’ wherein hallucinatory satisfaction precedes real satisfaction. So, man lives his life, not on the level of the ‘real’, but on the one of fiction – of (unconscious) representations, and his relation to reality is only possible via those ‘fictions’ – fictions that at the same time block for ever any ‘real’ relation with the real *as such*.

Man lives his real, vital existence, of course, but he does so from an ‘*andere Schauplatz*’, from a fictional scene in which pleasure triumphs over vital necessity and vital necessity

— that is, necessity *tout court* — is subject to libidinal surplus value. Such value is a profit gained on the field of the unconscious. As a libidinal being, man lives in a universe of fictional representations, in which identity and existence, including his own, are no less fictional. This is not to say that, next to vital existence, he cherishes all kind of fantasies. Rather, it is to say that fictions and fantasies constitute the very *scene on which he is* lives his vital existence. We – including our identity – are made out of fictions and fantasies.

The hysterical patients who lead Freud to invent psychoanalysis — Anna O., Elizabeth von R., Dora, and others — all suffered from sexual traumas the symptoms of which could be traced back to largely *imaginary* experiences. They were so to say *malades imaginaires*. But Freud's invention, it should be noted, allowed him to take seriously these imaginary experiences *as such*. In spite of the fact that his patients mostly imagined their illnesses, Freud nevertheless considered these illnesses to be real, treating the imagination with the seriousness it deserves. He acknowledged they indeed lived on '*eine andere Schauplatz*', on the scene of representations.

In light of the hegemonic status of today's scientific discourse, this approach remains the true *skandalon* of psychoanalysis, inasmuch as the formal — or, more precisely, Cartesian — paradigm of science forestalls affirmation of the imagination. Beginning with Descartes, through the materialism of the eighteenth century, to the scientific consensus in place today, physical needs arise exclusively from physical states. For Descartes, the soul was still a 'substance' or '*res*', apart from that other *res*, the body. With La Mettrie and the materialism of the eighteenth century, up to and including the materialism of the twenty-first century, scientific reality has been reduced to one *res*: the physical, 'objective' reality. Since, the sphere of the subjectivity — what used to be known as the 'soul' — is widely thought to be pathetic and unreliable; for this reason, it cannot but seem ridiculous to look there for the source of bodily ailment.

It is precisely there, however, in relation to the stammering of the patient's speech and the subject of his or her fantasies, visualizations, and imaginarizations, that Freud reorients etiology, the search for the causes of mental disease. It should be made clear, though, that Freud does not break with this long materialist tradition and reinstate the soul. In Freud's view, too, the soul does not exist, and the substance of the patient's speech is not grounded in objective reality: it is fiction and imagination, it is an effect of the 'ghost in the machine.' Yet, Freud's claim is that the imagination *qua imagination* — the fantasy *qua fantasy* — is the cause of Anna O's, Elisabeth von R's or Dora's bodily symptoms. He introduced the primacy of the imagination as the true axiom of good 'mental' healthcare: this thesis is the *skandalon* psychoanalysis must continue to defend against the hegemonic paradigm of the reigning scientific discourse.

Man lives proceeding from an imagination that in the end is irreducible to 'real facts'. This is what Freud's primacy of the unconscious is about: Man lives and thinks proceeding from unconscious representations. The ruling principle of his life, the pleasure principle, operates on – and from – this level. It is only secondarily that the 'reality principle' corrects the representations marked with pleasure, and leads them in the direction of the vital needs and of some *spezifische Aktion*.<sup>vii</sup> The *andere Schauplatz* in accordance with which man lives is indeed a *Schauplatz*, a scene, theater, or non-substantial, artificial platform of representations. The *core mission* of psychoanalysis is to take this *fictional scene* seriously as the real cause of the 'strange' life man lives. To the

extent that man's problems take form in the imagination, it does not make sense to explain them away; instead, they must be traced back to the 'material' ground of the imagination, the layer of unconscious representations — what Freud names the 'Ucs. System' or what Lacan refers to as the 'symbolic', the field of signifiers. Fiction, fantasies, images, signifiers: being libidinal, this is the 'stuff we are made of'. With this fictional material the pleasure economy creates our identity, and if there is a problem with this identity, it follows logically that its cause is to be found in the pleasure economy and in the fictional field it operates in.

### ... & ECONOMY

Does the expression 'pleasure economy' still refer to what is meant today by 'economy'? Does the fact that, in a pleasure economy, there is nothing that does not play out at the level of fantasy and the imagination not contradict the 'hard reality' of contemporary global capitalism? Is the economic terminology of psychoanalysis still applicable today?

It is surprising just how applicable the psychoanalytic pleasure economy is with regard to current economic conditions. As I have suggested above, the pleasure economy bears no relation to the Aristotelian economy or the Christian salvation economy, but it does correspond to the prevailing global capitalist economy. Insofar as psychoanalysis maintains that the psychic apparatus — and, more generally, the concrete functioning of the human organism — produces surplus pleasure or libidinal surplus value in the very process of satisfying needs, it offers a compelling account of contemporary economic reality.

Much like a pleasure economy, the 'standard' economy does not aim at the satisfaction of needs. Although it may appear to respond to needs, it aims, in point of fact, to produce surplus value in the process of satisfying needs; as such, it is nothing more than a network of exchange between capitalization and the investment of surplus value. It is all a matter of exploiting — and, if possible, creating — the proverbial 'hole in the market.' Capitalist economy must find a way to recreate this hole again and again in order to maintain itself. In much the same way, according to Lacan, the primacy of the pleasure principle, in Freudian theory, presupposes the primacy of desire — unfulfillable desire — as the essence of man: Man consciously aims to extinguish his deficit or sense of inadequacy with respect to social norms and ideals, but he does so unaware of the fact that, all the while, the psychic apparatus aims to recreate this deficit again and again in order to maintain itself.

Mental healthcare services often disregard such Freudian-Lacanian insights, but professional marketers and advertisers certainly don't. For them it is clear that it is all a matter, not of selling a product *stricto sensu*, but of selling the *need* for the product, i.e. the unsatisfiable longing for it. Coca-Cola is among the most successful products in the history of the world, not because it is particularly thirst quenching or in some other way superior to other soft drinks, but because it causes desire. Coca-Cola sells *thirst* for Coca-Cola.

Human wheeling and dealing is not a consequence of the satisfaction of vital needs; it is a consequence of the *need for needs*. Inasmuch as the pleasure principle drives him, man needs something to need, and the moment he satisfies a need he is returned immediately

to a state of dissatisfaction. This is the ethical and practical dimension of the Freudian theory of the pleasure principle: The patient's complaint bears witness to an unconscious pleasure, and the deficit in his or her 'mental health' is not to be approached by means of the *content* of the complaint, but by means of the *pleasure* he or she invests in and secures by the complaint itself. Pleasure is not in vital activity *per se*; it is in the representations of the 'memory' that (paradoxically) precede vital activity in the *andere Schauplatz*, the scene in which pleasure is capitalized on within a network of representations. This *Schauplatz* is the fictional scene in which the logic pertaining to the satisfaction of needs is twisted, inextricably, if subtly, and made, in Freud's words, 'polymorphously perverse.'<sup>viii</sup>

Not unlike a pleasure economy, the scene of contemporary global capitalism is also, contrary to all belief, largely fictional. Of course, there is no economy without the production of goods, but the value of the goods an economy produces does not determine its value; instead, the law of supply and demand does this, which — as Marx famously explains — gives rise to a fetish market in which use value is detached from exchange value.<sup>ix</sup> Hence, under the capitalist mode of production, a commodity is reduced to a fictional variable, abstracted from the actual reality of vital needs and economic production. The value of a commodity or, for that matter, an economic variable of any kind — even the value of an economy *tout court* — depends in large measure on its fictional representations. The value of a consumer good, for example, depends on what others are willing — or, more precisely, what others *imagine* others are willing — to pay for it.

The fact that a painting by Van Gogh is worth an unseemly amount, for instance, is not a consequence of its inherent value (and no one would be more acutely aware of this than Van Gogh himself); rather, it is a consequence of the fact that we all imagine that others are potentially willing to pay an outrageous amount for it. This value does not depend on something 'real,' but on the imaginization of a fictional representation (that is, the exorbitant price others might be willing to pay for the painting). In this way, a fictional representation is autonomous, for better or for worse, with regard to the reality of vital needs and economic production; it is, in effect, an economic reality of its own.

This fictional reality is made evident in forms of exchange in which the reality of commodity fetishism bears no relation to the reality of vital needs and economic production, and nowhere is this fiction more evident than in the case of money.<sup>x</sup> On what basis is money of value, aside from the fact that people believe in its value? What is the source of its reality, if not faith, trust, and the imagination?

Faith, trust, and the imagination, however, cannot be traced back to the imagination of free and independent individuals: it is an imagination that precedes the individual ones and which they all share. It is a common imagination that has no proper owner and that Lacan defines as 'the Other'. The value of money has its 'ground' in that 'Other'. Money is exclusively grounded to the Other's evaluation, its value based on what we think that others imagine that others will pay for it. Nowhere is it on solid ground; shared faith, mutual trust, and a historical imagination all determine its value. Such is the case, however, only insofar as its value remains unchecked. The abiding fear in a capitalist economy is that everyone will withdraw their money from the bank at the same time, wanting to feel it between their fingers, so to speak, if only for a moment. The potential for such 'reality testing' always lurks as a virtual threat under capitalism. Capital subsists

in the money individuals borrow from others, trusting that it will be preserved, and this trust is rewarded with added value in the form of interest. If all of us (or even a substantial minority) collectively withdraw our money from the world's banks all at once, money would, in principle, lose its value instantly and economic 'reality' would collapse. The monetary system (and, *mutatis mutandis*, the whole economy) is built on shared faith and mutual trust in something that only exists in its representation. The system maintains itself only insofar as it maintains, again and again and with ever-new energy, the persistent virtual threat of an internal collapse.

This is the economy the psychoanalytic pleasure economy applies to: a pure trade economy in which exchange value, rather than use value, prevails and the Other *qua* system of commodity exchange, rather than a laborer him- or herself, determines the measure of value. To be subject to capitalism is also to be the subject of its delusions — and 'delusions' is the proper term here, insofar as the entire system of commodity exchange is based, in the last instance, on nothing more than the imagination.

In psychoanalytic theory, the imagination is not a property of a pre-given subject, as many in Descartes' wake have come to believe. The *cogito* is not able to freely imagine everything; on the contrary, even the *cogito* — that is, the self or psychic identity — is a product of the imagination, which is itself, in turn, a formal operation of the psychic apparatus or, more specifically, an economic and historical formation of the pleasure principle in relation to the field of unconscious representations. In response to both endogenous and exogenous stimuli, these representations must yield pleasure in order to be 'in the black'; in other words, the stimuli are secondary in the pathways or network system (what Freud calls the *Bahnungen*) until they are able to capitalize on a representation in order to record libidinal profit.

The repository of such profit is also a product of the imagination *qua* a formal operation of the psychic apparatus. The economic system must invent a *bank*, that is, an imaginary central agency on the basis of which the apparatus can manage and evaluate records of libidinal profit. As in a capitalist economy, a pleasure economy cannot do without a bank, i.e. without a supposed bearer, an *ego* or *subject*.

Insofar as this subject is at odds with him- or herself psychically, he or she must confront the subject of his or her pleasure economy, an economy that, first and foremost, operates on its 'own' (which is why it is not, strictly speaking, *his* pleasure economy or *her* pleasure economy) and that, secondarily, gives rise to the subject of the ego *qua* (supposed, imagined) 'owner' or bank manager. The ego's problems concern the operation of the bank. According to Freudian libido theory, psychological problems are problems in which the bank is no longer able to manage its pleasure economy; the unconscious representations that record libidinal profit no longer redound to the ego in its relation to social norms and ideals.

It is not a mere coincidence that Lacan interprets Freudian theory as a theory of the *subject*: Insofar as the subject speaks about him- or herself, he or she — *qua* 'I' or subject of the enunciation (*le sujet de l'énonciation*) — is not the subject about whom he or she speaks, the grammatical 'I' or subject of the statement (*le sujet de l'énoncé*) that represents the subject in the statement; whereas the former is the objectified pendent of the ego in the realm of language, the latter is nothing but the linguistic correspondent of the ego. Such a distinction, according to Lacan, attests to the primacy of the unconscious.

With each speech act, the human subject drives a wedge between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the statement, and at the most intimate level of his or her identity, the subject's libidinal economy functions as a defense mechanism, confronting the threat of potential collapse with an almost limitless array of tricks, repressions, and denials. Anyone suffering from a serious psychological problem will not be able to avoid such a confrontation, and the role of psychoanalysis — or, for that matter, any form of psychotherapy — is to help the subject negotiate the risk of psychological collapse that necessarily attends to a pleasure economy.

It should go without saying here that it is of no help to approach a psychological problem as a deviation from a natural or social norm, since a pleasure economy, by definition, is a deviation, built on nothing then the imagination, and the imagination is the hallmark of a 'healthy' psychic economy. The libidinal being makes use of the machinery of the imagination — the unconscious representations on account of which it is possible to record libidinal profit — to produce, on the basis of the wealth credited to the bank, the *illusion* of real accreditation. In this way, a healthy pleasure economy can maintain a relation to the threat of psychological collapse. However, just as, in the effort to realize its value, the withdrawal of money from the world's banks poses the threat of economic collapse, so too does the withdrawal of pleasure from the psychic bank pose the threat of psychological collapse. At the moment of withdrawal, the subject, seduced by the image of definitive satisfaction, denies the deficit upon which the illusion of the bank is produced and, in so doing, risks falling into a trap of his or her own making.

Prior to this moment of collapse, the object of desire again and again escaped the subject's desire, the latter supposing that the object is to be found in a signifier — in money for instance. However risky it can be to consider money (or any other signifier) as the ultimate object of desire, danger really threatens when one thinks that the object of desire is disconnected from any kind of signifier, since only the signifier postpones the ultimate satisfaction — and, thus, the collapse — of his pleasure economy. As Lacan develops throughout his teaching, the satisfaction of desire can be found only there where it is annulled, that is, in the indefinite postponement of satisfaction. The economic system is always at risk of collapsing because there is no ultimate 'thing' outside the field of unconscious representations to ground it definitively. However, when the psychic apparatus has no signifier or other defense mechanism left to prevent the ultimate satisfaction of human desire — when, in other words, *jouissance* becomes *real*, then the enjoyed object of desire becomes really dark (to refer to Luis Buñuel's '*obscure object of desire*') and destroys the subject and its entire pleasure economic system.

## THE PLACE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

It is strange that psychoanalysis would receive so much criticism at this historical moment, particularly in light of the fact that its theory of a pleasure economy is eerily compatible with the prevailing capitalist economy that permeates every aspect of contemporary culture. Notwithstanding the Freudo-Marxism of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, psychoanalytic theory has more in common with capitalism than one might expect, certainly more than was expected in those revolutionary years. Why, then, is psychoanalysis discredited now? Is it too close to contemporary global capitalism, and has it therefore lost its critical distance? Or has its relation to capitalism become too dangerous, too critical for a culture that does not function without repressing its truth?



Psychoanalysis is not powerless to answer these questions, especially since it is aware of its tragic task to expose a truth that must not be exposed. Repression cannot simply be lifted, since it is a condition of truth itself. If psychoanalysis can expose, in the era of global capitalism, the truth of the 'capitalist' psychic apparatus, it will succeed in exposing a condition that operates primarily by means of repression. But shining a light does not lift repression; for repression operates '*à ciel ouvert*' and knows how to use the gestures that expose her in such a way that they help her displace the truth even more effectively.

A comparison with a phenomenon in the 'regular' economy may be of some use here. It is well known, of course, that every advertisement is a lie: A rugged expedition through a tropical rain forest has nothing whatsoever to do with the noxious tobacco product for sale, nor is there a relation between the pristine Hawaiian beach and the ostentatious beverage the consumer is enjoined to enjoy. The lies in circulation around the globe today are at least as numerous and aggressive as the lies about the rituals and paraphernalia of gods and saints that once formed the basis of a dominant worldview. After centuries of enlightenment critique, the time has come to accept not only that lies do indeed work, but also, and more importantly, that the act of exposing a lie has become an integral part of its strategy. Commercials that foreground their own mendacity are among the most successful.

Psychoanalysis — and especially its Lacanian version — is one of the few theories to explain the complex dialectics of this phenomenon and to map the ways in which lies, fantasies, and the imagination form the 'material' with which men and women construct their personal and cultural identities. Psychoanalysis can explain the ways in which exposing the imagination serves often at the same time to strengthen it. As a formation of the unconscious, the imagination functions even *with the knowledge* that it functions as imagination, however rare it may be to know this, and however fleeting such knowledge may ultimately prove to be.

In a world in which the condition and horizon of truth is the groundlessness of the imagination, psychoanalysis is certainly needed. In a world in which groundless imagination has become the horizon and condition of truth, psychoanalysis is one of the few theories – if not the only one – the think man as being the subject of that imagination – particularly insofar as it makes it possible to approach the subject of the imagination as an effect and product of a *libidinally grounded* imagination in relation to which the subject imagines a place for him- or herself outside of and apart from the imagination. Only, man is not able to appropriate that place and to make it the point from where, with the self-assurance of a Cartesian subject, he subjects the universe to his sovereign will. If there is freedom, it is given in the distance with regard to the images and signifiers that make man what he is. It is only given in the ceaselessly repeated 'de-centering' of the ego he imagines he is.

Not surprisingly, then, psychoanalysis is treated like the plague. Its critical intervention into visual culture, for example, exposes a truth that, once laid bare, does no longer function. Hence the various attempts from within visual culture to neutralize such criticism, or to turn it against psychoanalytic theory itself. It is not difficult to do so, after all, insofar as psychoanalysis is a plague, above all, to itself. It seems to clip its own wings, as it were, before it even begins to fly. Before the truth of the subject of the

unconscious is ever revealed, psychoanalysis must admit that its truth cannot tolerate light, and this discredits the light it shines in advance, a discredit the dominant culture is only too happy to exploit.

No wonder psychoanalysis is so often returned to its own practice: it teaches the subject that his or her experience is little more than an inevitable confrontation with a necessarily repressed truth. Such is the only fair 'answer' mental healthcare can give in response to the question on the basis of which it derives its *raison d'être*. The looming danger, however, is that once she returns to her practice, she will either imprison himself or, blinded by her sense of right, crash into her own self-righteousness.

Psychoanalysis occupies a critical place under capitalism to the extent that it analyzes the libidinal structure of both its culture and the subject's flourishing in it. If, in contrast to a few decades ago, it is no longer possible to dream of an alternative to capitalism, the critical impact of such analysis is not greater, but it is also no less necessary. In the name of mental health, a 'psychoanalysis of the people' must be accessible to those embedded in capitalism financially, theoretically, and critically.

*Translated by Baylee Brits<sup>xi</sup>*

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<sup>i</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 225.

<sup>ii</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (hereafter *S.E.*), ed. and trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), 1:281-397.

<sup>iii</sup> For a reflection on the 'economic' logic of early and medieval Christian doctrine, see for instance: Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, translation Lorenzo Chiesa and \*\*\*, \*\*\*\*

<sup>iv</sup> Lacan uses the expression *entre cuir et chair* to locate the unconscious between the Pcs. system and the Ucs. system in Freud's first topography. See *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 51 & 61; the English edition translates this expression as 'between the glove and the hand.' See also *L'identification* (1961-1962), unpublished seminar, 10 January 1962.

<sup>v</sup> See Freud, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, in *S.E.* 1:279, 301, & 303; and *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *S.E.* 5:565.

<sup>vi</sup> See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *S.E.* 5:536.

<sup>vii</sup> See Freud, 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,' in *S.E.* 12:218-26. For more on the 'entanglement' between pleasure and reality under the hegemony of the pleasure principle, see Lacan, 'Pleasure and reality,' in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 32-34; and for an *Auseinandersetzung* of this dense passage, see Marc De Kesel, 'Pleasure, Reality

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and Logos,’ in *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan’s Seminar VII*, trans. Sigi Jöttkandt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 72-82.

<sup>viii</sup> Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in *S.E.* 7:191.

<sup>ix</sup> See, for example, the well-known section on ‘The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof’ in Karl Marx, ‘Capital, Volume One,’ in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 319-29.

<sup>x</sup> See, for instance, James Buchan, *Frozen Desire – An Enquiry into the Meaning of Money* (London: Picador, 1997); Pierre Vilar, *A history of Gold and Money*, translated by Judith White (London / New York: Verso, 2011); Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money*, London: Pinguin, 2008.

<sup>xi</sup> The translator would like to thank Thijs Witty for his assistance. [Trans.]