

Title: Neoliberalism and Liminality: Perverse Cruelties in the Age of the Capitalist Discourse

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In this chapter, I will take up a number of Lacan's conceptions of perversion to shed light on the perverse cruelty at the heart of neoliberalism. Seen through the lens of Lacan's discourse of the capitalist, neoliberalism is a perverse discourse insofar as it reduces desire to demand and disavows the lack in the Other. Instead of the promised satisfaction that accompanies each new product or experience, what results for the subject is an endless cycle of the production of painful surplus-jouissance (*plus-de-jouir*). Further perverse cruelties can be seen in the ways in which the *parlêtre*, the speaking being under neoliberalism, is marked by liminality at the level of identity. A type of subjective position that Carol Owens and I see as rapidly proliferating in our neoliberal age is what we call a "liminal creature" or a "liminal being." Liminal creatures are those who are shaped by the capitalistic superegoic command to "Enjoy!," interpreting it at the level of identity in an ideal of endless becoming in pursuit of one's own brand of jouissance. Far from achieving the imagined pleasures associated with meeting the contemporary ideal of "you doing/being you," such liminal beings are instead beholden to the ravages of the drive. This chapter has three main sections. First, the cruelties inherent in neoliberalism are explained and explored via Lacan's discourse of the capitalist. Second, the liminal being is shown to exemplify a certain type of suffering associated with late capitalism, one that is in some ways paradigmatic. YouTubers and posthuman transhumanists are given as examples of liminal beings. Third, the discourse of the analyst is posited as a way out of the suffering produced by engaging in the capitalist discourse; however, as Lacan pointed out, this solution is only for some.

Neoliberalism and the Capitalist Discourse

Neoliberalism, referring to the current phase of capitalism, comprises a set of ideological practices which are applied both to the market and to social life. As such, it has profoundly affected and shaped both the social sphere and the individual. Neoliberalism began as a set of financial policies in response to the economic turmoil of the 1970s, when governments shifted away from intervention in the market by governments seeking to promote the welfare of its people and toward a radically free market in which competition is maximized. Reaganism and Thatcherism are paradigmatic examples of the promotion of neoliberal policies and ideology. For instance, during Margaret Thatcher's terms as Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, her attempts to revive the U.K.'s economy resulted in a dramatic increase in poverty rates—increases which correspond to her opinions about the “dependency culture” she saw as having been fostered by governmental welfare which she opposed.¹ Thatcher is infamous for her radically individualist statement, “There is no such thing as society.”² Correspondingly, neoliberal ideology defines individuals as consumers who compete for resources and who are rewarded for hard work or ingenuity and punished for the lack thereof. The deregulated market supposedly ensures that each individual receives what she or he deserves, positing that inequality is due to the presence or absence of individual merits rather than problems with the system of late capitalism itself. In other words, in perverse fashion, the neoliberal symbolic order is one that disavows castration and ensures the suffering associated with increased inequality as well as the guilt accompanying failure to live up to its ideals.

In the name of ideal of individualism and the supposedly equal opportunities available via neoliberalism, indifference to the welfare of others proliferates. Although of course the diagnoses of psychopath and Anti-Social Personality Disorder bear little resemblance to psychoanalytic conceptions of perversion, they do capture something of essence of the cruel

indifference or coldness that Gilles Deleuze highlighted in his study of Masoch in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*.³ As such, it is notable that a 2019 article in *Forbes* cites psychologist Kevin Dutton as maintaining that, along with “attorney, media personality and salesperson,” one of the most common career choices for psychopaths includes Chief Executive Officer of a company.

Our social sphere, currently marked by neoliberalism, shapes individuals in particular fashions such that the speaking being of today’s time does not navigate the sexual non-rapport and structural division in the same ways as those of Freud’s time. We therefore see different sorts of complaints in the clinic corresponding to the ways those under capitalism deal with *das Unbehagen*, their discontents or their suffering. Patients today suffer not so much from guilt or shame about jouissance as from commanded jouissance, or from a societal superegoic imperative to follow one’s jouissance rather than to pursue one’s desire. Correspondingly, the newer versions of the DSM have added disorders related to such an imperative, including diagnoses like “Gambling Use Disorder” and “Binge Eating Disorder.” In true neoliberal fashion, rather than taking a critical look at the social structure that breeds such difficulties, those diagnosed with such disorders are seen as failing at a moral level, as lacking in “impulse control”.

Although Lacan’s most substantive discussion of the capitalist discourse was given in 1972 (“The Discourse of Jacques Lacan at the University of Milan”),⁴ his comments provide important insights about the social bond under neoliberalism that was to take root more firmly by the end of the 1970s. For Lacan, a discourse is a structural system of relations that regulates interactions between its elements, and it is thus what makes a particular social bond operate. By way of the capitalist discourse, we can understand that there is a particular social link that predominates in our age of neoliberalism, although other discourses and social links are also

possible. Lacan presented the bulk of his discourse theory in 1969-1970 via his seventeenth seminar, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*,⁵ when he spoke of the four discourses: the discourses of the hysteric, master, university, and analyst. Because the sexual relationship is real or “that which doesn’t stop...being written,”⁶ we must use speech in order to form bonds between people. Accordingly, each of the four discourses is a mode of dealing with the sexual non-rapport—the absence of fixed rules and laws regulating social relationships. Because a full explication of Lacanian discourse theory and the capitalist discourse are outside of the scope of this chapter, I will limit my comments to those most essential to understanding the neoliberal social bond as perverse or fetishistic and resulting in perverse cruelties.

Because Lacan’s original four discourses utilized a fixed structure, wherein there were only four possible variations, the capitalist discourse is what Lacan designated as the contemporary substitute for the master’s discourse.⁷ Whereas the master’s discourse is initiated by the S1 in the position of agent/semblance,⁸ through someone playing the role of an authority who makes commandments, the capitalist discourse is initiated when someone plays the role of the split subject, demanding the resolution of the lack inherent to subjectivity. While it may not be immediately apparent why Lacan considered the capitalist discourse to be so closely related to the master’s discourse—apart from each serving as the dominant discourse for their respective epochs—what is evident is that although the figure of the master is hidden from the position of agent, the master in the form of the structure of neoliberalism is that which silently pulls the strings. In other words, in neoliberal society we believe we have the freedom to order this or that product or to choose this or that lifestyle, but yet neoliberalism is inescapably powerful, being constitutive of our very selves.

In his designation of the capitalist discourse as the substitute for the master's discourse, Lacan suggested that the social structure reflective of the discourse of the master, the age of the traditional authoritarian Other, had declined and was beginning to be replaced by the capitalist discourse. Insofar as psychoanalysis had long since commented on the symptoms associated with the decline of the traditional figure of the father, Lacan said, "the crisis, not of the master discourse, but of capitalist discourse, which is its substitute, is overt (*ouverte*)."⁹ What is this crisis that Lacan foresaw?

The answer is evident in the formula for the capitalist discourse provided by Lacan in 1972, which can be written via the master's discourse but with three key alterations:

- 1) The horizontal arrow on the top row pointing from the position of agent/semblance to the position of other/jouissance is removed.
- 2) The arrow on the left-hand side which points vertically up from the position of truth to the position of agent/semblance becomes an arrow pointing downwards, rendering the previously inaccessible position of truth now accessible to the agent.
- 3) S1 is replaced by \$.

The three alterations present in the represent several important features of our current age of consumerism under capitalism: the decline of the social bond, the changing position of truth, and that the agent who runs the show is a subject attempting to deny the non-rapport and engaging in the perverse disavowal of castration.

Correspondingly, consider Lacan's main comments about the capitalist discourse:

"it is the cleverest discourse that we have made. It is no less headed for a blowout. This is because it is untenable. It is untenable . . . in a thing that I could explain to you . . . because capitalist discourse is here, you see . . . [*indicates the formula on the board*] . . . a little inversion simply between the S1 and the S. . . which is the subject . . . it suffices so that that goes on casters (*ça marche comme sur des roulettes*), indeed that cannot go

better, but that goes too fast, that consumes itself, that consumes itself so that is consumed (*ça se consomme, ça se consomme si bien que ça se consume*).”¹⁰

The capitalist discourse is supported by casters, endlessly racing around, because it supposes itself to have found a way around the non-rapport. In the original four discourses, the non-rapport is maintained by the inaccessibility of the position of truth and by the positions of agent and other being influenced by two other positions that are not mutually related. The capitalist discourse, by contrast, utilizes an arrow that arrives at all four of the positions, creating an endless closed circuit of movement. In Lacan’s comment that this discourse “goes too fast, that consumes itself,” we can see an allusion to the consumer culture of capitalism in contemporary times. Moreover, it consumes itself because of the loss of distance between the split subject and the object *a* (on account of the inversion of $\$$ and $S1$) which results in the split subject being plagued by the bodily tension inherent in surplus-jouissance—since the object *a* here occupies the position of surplus-jouissance.

The capitalist discourse can be considered perverse from several angles. In the perverse subject’s placement of himself in the position of object *a* as object-cause of the Other’s jouissance (citation), he tries “himself compensate for the flaw of the Other.”¹¹ Lacan saw the mechanism of disavowal as being constitutive of the subjectivity of the pervert, with the foundational disavowal being that of the Other’s castration. The capitalist discourse can correspondingly be considered perverse as it manufactures a belief in the existence of a solution to lack. As such, the capitalist discourse revolves around a disavowal, which might be stated as “I know very well that the next $S1$ won’t bring me the promised state of satisfaction, but all the same I prefer to believe that upon obtaining it I will feel complete.” $S1$ thus functions as a sort of fetish object to make up for lack.

Under the capitalist discourse, the split subject disavows castration through its attempt to aim directly at what it supposes to be the root of the problem: the lack of a particular S1, seen as a certain product or experience that could be achieved in reality. In so doing, the capitalist discourse erodes the social bond, because the agent/semblance in the original four discourses makes an appeal to the other (as indicated by the horizontal arrow starting from the position of the agent/semblance and pointing at the other—an arrow which is only absent in the capitalist discourse). For instance, in the discourse of the hysteric, which also begins with the split subject, the suffering corresponding to the subject's lack is addressed to an authority in the hope that the authority will provide answers that will quell the suffering. In contrast, in the capitalist discourse that suffering is presumed to have a direct answer in S1 (occupying the position of truth which is inaccessible to the agent/semblance in the original four discourses). As such, the social relation, speaking beings addressing one another, is passed over in favor of aiming directly at an answer, at an S1 that will get rid of the subject's *Unbehagen*. Lacan thus said in Television in 1974: "capitalism, that was its starting point: getting rid of sex."¹² The resulting social changes such as neighbors hardly knowing one another and people choosing technology over socialization abound.

In its reach toward an S1, the capitalist discourse disavows that the discontents resulting from subjective division are structural and irremediable. The capitalist discourse emphasizes subjective discontents and manufactures demands for S1s which supposedly remedy those very discontents. The advertising industry is the most obvious way in which this is achieved, as it is the science of how to create consumer demand for specific products. A successful advertising campaign targets a certain type of individual, making an educated guess at what might approximate the object *a*, and then trying to convince such a person that the product will bring

them complete satisfaction. For example, some might be persuaded that a gold Rolex watch, if only they could save enough money for its purchase, would perfectly complement their lack, enabling them to have finally “made it” or to really be able to enjoy themselves. With its emphasis on self-responsibility for one’s sufferings, neoliberal ideology even promotes S1s which are touted to treat the sufferings created by the very excess in jouissance commanded by neoliberalism: for instance, meditation practices, anti-depressant medications, the newest diet regime, and self-help programs such as Marie Kondo’s organizing method that encourages consumers to minimize their possessions and throw out everything that does not “spark joy”—while at the same time offering products for purchase “that will spark joy for years to come!”¹³

CAPITALIST DISCOURSE AND SURPLUS JOUISSANCE

The perversity of the capitalist discourse hinges upon its disavowal of lack. The perverse cruelty at the heart of neoliberalism can be found in the subject’s relation to surplus-jouissance. Unlike jouissance, surplus jouissance is not related to the law but instead to the failure of discourse itself. In Lacan’s discussion of surplus jouissance at the beginning of Seminar XVII,¹⁴ he continued the comparison he made in his prior seminar with the Marxist conception of surplus value, wherein the aim of capitalism is making a profit through the sale of fetishized products. In Seminar XVI, Lacan pointed out that that using discourse creates a fetishistic relationship to surplus-jouissance.¹⁵ As Samo Tomšič¹⁶¹⁷ lucidly describes it, whereas in capitalism commodities are produced while in discourse language is produced, a fetishist relation to these products is created in both systems. At the same time, there is a loss at the center of both capitalism and discourse. The lack and loss around which discourse revolves is why in Seminar XIX Lacan designates surplus-jouissance as the product of each of the discourses.¹⁸ By using language to address the lack of jouissance at the center of subjectivity, language invariably falls

short, as Lacan expressed in Seminar XVII when he said that surplus jouissance is at the center of the experience of “the entire dialectic of frustration in analysis.”¹⁹ In other words, when language or discourse is utilized, the result is a painful bodily experience of frustration: surplus-jouissance, as external to discourse. Surplus-jouissance, as an unsettling bodily tension, is therefore part and parcel of our alienation in language, but it has an especially disturbing status in its placement in the capitalist discourse.

The heart of the perverse cruelty of the capitalist discourse is the split subject’s discontents being in object *a* in the position of surplus-jouissance. To underscore the point, it is the only discourse in which the split subject is directly affected by the object *a* (on account of the diagonal arrow beginning at the object *a* in the position of product or surplus-jouissance and pointing at the split subject in the position of agent or semblant). Whereas in the four discourses the suffering linked to surplus-jouissance is managed by making an appeal to an other via the social bond, in the capitalist discourse the subject’s solution is the endless search for a better, truer, S1. As soon as the split subject as consumer obtains the S1, S1 loses its veil and becomes just another product to be used and discarded, just another experience to undergo, just another signifier. With the object *a* in the position of surplus-jouissance, this disappointing realization elicits the painful feeling of loss and desire which is characteristic of surplus-jouissance.

Nevertheless, instead of realizing the jig is up, the subject in the capitalist discourse is further fueled by the surplus jouissance of its renewed discontents, and begins the cycle of consumption anew through the appointment of a new signifier to the status of S1. That is why Lacan remarks upon the continuous loop on which the capitalist’s discourse runs that burns the subject out.

As previously stated, Lacan dubbed the capitalist discourse the contemporary substitute for the master’s discourse in the wake of the decline of the authoritarian father figure.

Correspondingly, in *Television*, given in 1973, the year after Lacan's presentation at the University of Milan of the formula for the capitalist discourse, he remarked upon the loss of an authority who could tell us who and how to be in the way of identity and jouissance. In the age of the capitalist discourse, Lacan said that we instead take our "bearings from the ideal of an overcoming [*plus-de-jour*]." ²⁰ Back in 1960 in "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire, or Freud...", Lacan had said that the perverse structure is connected to the subject's attempt to "pursue jouissance as far as possible," ²¹ and so we can see that the capitalist discourse invites subjects as consumers to pursue jouissance as far as possible, to push past the limits of the pleasure principle. It was in this vein that Lacan remarked that "capitalism is the extensive, hence insatiable production of a lack in jouissance." ²²

Because neoliberalism does nothing to set limits on the drive—in fact, it does quite the opposite—contemporary subjects suffer its perverse cruelties through the transgression of the pleasure principle at the level of jouissance, linking jouissance to the cruel superego. As Lacan has argued, the superego itself is essentially an imperative to jouissance as the Other's "will-to-jouissance," ²³ remarking that "nothing forces anyone to enjoy (*jouir*) except the superego." ²⁴ Instead of producing pleasurable enjoyment, the superego ensures jouissance experienced as suffering. An update to Lacan's capitalist discourse is in order regarding how it revolves around the perverse neoliberal superegoic injunction "Enjoy!"—to "pursue jouissance as far as possible." ²⁵ In this regard, there is a doubling of the perverse cruelty in the capitalist discourse, in the sense that it compounds the suffering already associated with the superego by way of the neoliberal ideology of the pursuit of enjoyment. The pervert himself suffers on account of his excess in jouissance, and in fact the unconscious aim of a perverse act is to set limits to jouissance and bolster the paternal function. ²⁶ When, via the imperative of neoliberalism, the

neurotic subject attempts to realize him or herself the fantasy of the pervert's pursuit of jouissance to the limit or the neurotic's "dream of being [perverse],"²⁷ the reality is shown to be rife with painful surplus-jouissance. Along these lines, Lacan remarked "'That's not it' is the very cry by which the jouissance obtained is distinguished from the jouissance expected."²⁸²⁹ At best, the semblance of the promised jouissance of S1 falls short of the mark of the fullness of jouissance expected. Under neoliberalism, the experience of pleasurable enjoyment is often restricted to the expected jouissance of the S1, from the enjoyment of hitting the "order now" button on a website.

Whether the jouissance in question via the capitalist discourse is that of jouissance expected or the disturbing surplus jouissance that is actually obtained, Lacan has indicated that jouissance is in direct opposition with desire.³⁰ Consequently, the split subject's reach for the S1 cannot be situated within the axis of desire. Far from employing the subject's desire in its reach for each successive S1, the capitalist discourse operates to flatten desire to the level of demand. This is reminiscent, of course, of the pervert's reduction of the Other's desire to demand in seeing himself as the answer to the question of what the Other wants. Capitalist discourse mobilizes the reduction of desire to demand through the treatment of each pang of the subject's discontent as if there were an S1, a perfect complement, to address it. In clinical work in the age of neoliberalism, it is therefore especially challenging to hystericize the patient's desire through the transformation of the initial demand for something like "coping skills" to a radical questioning of oneself at the level of the unconscious. In therapeutic modalities such as CBT, the demand for coping skills as an S1 inevitably produces renewed discontents. What burns out in the capitalist discourse is the subject's desire, the demand for satisfaction at the expense of desire only serving to increase the perverse cruelty of the discourse. Although there is no such

thing in our society as escaping from the structure of capitalism, clinical work that operates in accordance with the discourse of the analyst—whether with neurotic or perverse subjects³¹—can serve as an antidote to many of the discontents suffered under the primacy of the capitalist discourse. In analysis, what is curative is the mobilization of the analysand's desire to explore the unconscious as well as the subject's eventual assumption of responsibility for desire.

In another take on how capitalism is a perverse discourse, we could consider capitalism itself as a form of perversion from the standpoint of capitalist discourse making itself the instrument for the Other's jouissance. More specifically, the capitalist discourse bears the most resemblance to the operations of the sadist. As I have pointed out in my book on perversion,³² in the perverse act the sadist plays the role of the lawgiving Other—an entity in whom the pervert only holds a tenuous belief—and humiliates and elicits anxiety from his victim. In playacting castration, the sadist brings the voice into the scenario and enunciates a law—or rather, the Other's desire or will which serves as a substitution for the sadist. This enunciation isolates that which embodies the object *a* for his victim, eliciting anxiety by threatening its loss, with the anxiety serving as proof of its status as the treasured object *a*. Through bringing into being the object *a* to which the law corresponds, the sadist makes the Other exist.

For the present purpose, it is noteworthy that the sadist utilizes the voice to enact a law in the form of his will given that the capitalist discourse, as a discourse, uses language and moreover enunciates a certain moral law via neoliberal ideology. We might say that the mobilization of the capitalist discourse mirrors the sadistic act to achieve its unconscious aim of propping up the societal Other shaped by neoliberalism. At a fundamental level, capitalist discourse as sadistic targets all individuals, and it is perhaps no accident that in our times anxiety disorders abound. Under capitalism, the individual imagines itself to be a free agent making

choices in pursuit of its own version of happiness, but the individual is actually a slave to the invisible master figure of neoliberalism. In fact, the individual's personal version of happiness is formed in relation to neoliberal ideology, and so it might embody what Derek Hook catchily describes as a "libidinal treasure" or an object *a* which is emblematic of a social group.³³ The sadistic capitalist structure operates by threatening the loss or seeming impossibility of attaining the S1 which elicits the individual's anxiety, brings forth the object *a*, and props up the Other of capitalism. The enunciation of the law of neoliberalism leaves the individual in a state of anxiety that s/he lacks the moral qualities necessary to succeed, worrying either that someone will wrest the object away or that obtaining the S1 might not be possible. In the U.S., for instance, the individual is endlessly caught up in working to realize the American dream, and this translates to not only labor but of course also consumeristic behavior which solidify the symbolic order of the U.S. as undergirded by neoliberalism.

In another important sense, sadistic capitalist discourse isolates object *a* by fueling fantasies which revolve around xenophobia. For example, in the U.S., the racialized other and the undocumented immigrant are discursively figured as either stealing or having stolen the nation's libidinal treasures. The xenophobe—in this light appearing as the "victim" of the sadism of the capitalist discourse—experiences the anxiety of castration in relation to seeing the target of xenophobia as having perpetrated or threatening to perpetrate the loss. Marginalized groups are, of course, seen through the lens of neoliberal ideology as enjoying too much and working too little, such that their modes of jouissance are fantasied to be destructive to the country's libidinal treasures and to the happiness of supposedly more deserving citizens of the neoliberal order. Capitalist discourse thus enunciates the moral law that disenfranchises marginalized groups (e.g., ensuring that racialized others are overrepresented in the prison

system, are more likely to work for minimum wage and lack health insurance, etc.)—while disavowing responsibility for so doing—and also brings the object *a* into being through the creation of anxiety in the xenophobic individual.

Liminal Beings in an Age of Commanded Jouissance

In his book *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society*, Paul Verhaeghe argued that neoliberalism's focus on achievement and happiness operates to destabilize one's identity. Referring to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's notion of contemporary society as "liquid modernity,"³⁴ Verhaeghe remarked, "a kind of 'liquid identity' has come into being."³⁵ Liquid identity, I would argue, corresponds to the notion of the liminal insofar as someone in a liminal state of being is in-between psychosocial positions and occupied with transition or change. The figure of the "borderline" (i.e., someone diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder), is thus perhaps the most commonly recognized type of being who suffers from identity instability under neoliberalism; of course, the illness is seen as reflective of the failures of the borderline him or herself rather than of the structure of neoliberalism. Of note is the borderline individual's characteristic and paradoxical cathexis to the label of BPD, revealing an enjoyment in claiming the signifier of "borderline" as speaking to their identity despite it typically being used in a derogatory fashion.

The liquid identity prominent under neoliberalism can be seen as paired with what Arpad Szakolczai has dubbed "permanent liminality." With "liquid identity" and "permanent liminality" in mind, Carol Owens and I have commented upon a neoliberal ideal of ceaseless liminality which shapes a certain type of speaking being—who strives toward ceaseless reinvention at the level of identity. Owens and I call those to aspire to this state "liminal creatures" or "liminal beings."

The liminal being is one who takes the neoliberal dictate “to thine own jouissance be true”³⁶ seriously, prizing the value of constant innovation that enables standing out amongst rivals, and endlessly strives for a better, more authentically enjoying self. Although this chapter’s focus is on the individual person as a liminal being, it is perhaps no accident that under capitalist discourse companies prioritize the ideal of innovation; in a recent BCG survey, 75% of companies reported innovation as a top-three priority.³⁷ The neoliberal value of innovation as a character trait—whether in reference to a person or a company (to the degree to which neoliberalism considers there to be a meaningful difference)—speaks to ideal of perpetual transformation in a liminal identity.

The liminal as an identity destination is a path which ensures the experience of several facets of the perverse cruelty at the heart of neoliberalism. First, a perpetual process of becoming creates its own unending source of guilt for the inevitable failure to reach and maintain the status of authentically enjoying and reinventing oneself. Second, the liminal is a response to experiences of transition, passage, disruption, or loss, and as such involves suffering.³⁸ To tarry in the liminal as an identity destination associated with an ideal of “to thine own jouissance be true” is to be unsettled and disturbed by the jouissance that corresponds to the drives running wild. Third, for a liminal being, the S1 is figured as an enjoyable object, experience, or identity label, and the attainment of the S1 is often fantasied to ensure an experience of or identity related to being true to their jouissance. Although the disappointments and false promises of the S1 correspond to the prototypical way in which the capitalist discourse adds fuel to the fire of the subject’s painful surplus jouissance, discussion of the fantasied S1s of the liminal being illuminates this type of subjectivity.

One identity label which might serve as an S1 affixed to the ideal of permanent liminality is “social media star,” because it promises constant transformation so as to reap the rewards associated with maintaining and attracting followers. One platform which makes this clear is BitClout. Essentially, BitClout is a social media platform in which users earn revenue and derive jouissance from being true to their jouissance. Earning the nickname of “social-media stock market,”³⁹ by way of the site’s native currency, BitClout, users can invest in someone’s “creator coin” if they believe her or his popularity will rise. A quick perusal of BitClout’s list of top-valued “creators” showed numerous social media stars, such as YouTuber MrBeast (at #25 on the list), with the vast majority of the top creators having recognizably large social media followings—an index which is included in the Top 100 chart.⁴⁰ Someone is called a “creator” if they have created or otherwise claimed their profile. Regarding these so-called BitClout “creators,” it is useful to recall Michel Foucault’s comment that in our age of neoliberalism the individual is “an entrepreneur of himself.”⁴¹ The ideal of entrepreneurship is to be self-directed, self-employed, and make lots of money. Often, it is paired with creativity and constant innovation so as to be on the cutting edge of the tastes of consumers, perhaps even creating something consumers did not previously know they craved. Wedding the value of creativity with the economy of late capitalism, each BitCoin creator is an entrepreneur of the self. What BitClout renders apparent is the neoliberal ideology of the liminal being as one that propagates the injunction to enjoy.

Through Foucault’s claim that the neoliberal subject is an entrepreneur of the self, he points out that what had been the self’s relatively immutable feature—the body—has now become possible to transform. Practices of transforming the body include such things as Lasik eye correction, plastic surgery, cool sculpt, as well as a litany of different diets to fit desired

associated identities (e.g., Paleo diet, slim fast, Nutrisystem, flexitarian, Eco Atkins, Supercharged Hormone, vegan). Such methods of bodily transformation aimed at increasing social capital promote at the same time an ideology of liminality. Including and extending beyond physical transformation is a so-called philosophy that rose to prominence under neoliberalism: transhumanism.

Liminal beings adhering to transhumanism pursue the neoliberal ideal of ceaseless liminality through a search for technologies that improve the human species. Enhancements are sought for problems related to human limitations in the way of decelerating the aging process and increasing longevity, increasing physical capabilities, and improving cognition, psychological capacities, and mood. The sciences behind bioengineering, genetic engineering, cybernetics, and digital technology are employed towards these ends. It is no accident that the transhumanist movement began at the same time as neoliberalism. Not only do transhumanist liminal beings seek to go beyond the limits of the human condition, but they also believe that doing so is possible. (Accordingly, some transhumanist liminal beings might very well be psychotic in structure if this belief is at the level of delusion.) As such, transhumanism mobilizes science to disavow the Other's castration through a denial that the human species is irrevocably limited and lacking.

Liminal beings who follow transhumanism believe that they occupy liminal identities between human and technology, between human and posthuman, and are forever striving to transform to the next level of human being. In 2018, photographer Matthieu Gafsou created a series of photographs of transhumanists entitled "H+," bringing to mind human plus, as something beyond or better than human.⁴² Gafsou's photographs feature the likes of Lukas Zpira, who wrote the "Body Hactivism Manifesto"⁴³ and Julien Deceroi, who implanted a

magnet into his middle finger to give himself another sense perception—that of the perception of magnetic fields.⁴⁴ This type of liminal being seeks to make a reality out of the fantasy of the cyborg which is a common trope in science fiction on the page and on the screen (e.g., *Robocop*). Each augmentation and reinvention of the self functions as an S1.

At the extreme, posthuman transhumanists believe that even death can be conquered.⁴⁵ To somehow remove from the equation humanity's being-towards-death (to allude to Heidegger) would create a different type of being, a posthuman being. Plugging up the ultimate lack in human beings is an immensely popular fantasy in the neoliberal age as reflected on the screen. The achievement of digital immortality is depicted in *Upload* by way of uploading one's consciousness to a data cloud, while immortality is achieved in *Altered Carbon* via uploading one's consciousness to a synthetic body called a "sleeve"—as though a body were simply clothing to be traded in, changed, and augmented as one pleases. Even if both series serve in some ways as cautionary tales, they nevertheless depict access to an enjoyment beyond the limits of the human species. To call this enjoyment "superhuman" would not be accidental given the explosion of popularity in the figure of the superhero—which itself is another type of transhuman fantasy—evident in the proliferation of on the screen stories of the genre in the age of neoliberalism.

Alcor is a company that offers cryogenic suspension or "pausing the dying process," and as of June 13, 2021, had 1,353 "members" who pay a monthly subscription fee in order to be cryogenically preserved at some later date.⁴⁶ One such Alcor member was notable transhumanist FM-2030, who on July 8, 2000 died from pancreatic cancer and was vitrified. Reflecting his belief in the eventuality of digital immortality and the transportation of the mind through outer space, FM-2030 was born—or "launched" as he called it on October 15, 1930⁴⁷—as Fereidoun

M. Esfandiary. He explained that he changed his name in the mid-1970s for two primary reasons. First, the “2030” part of his self-nomination demonstrated his belief that he would live to the age of 100 and that in “2030 we will be ageless and everyone will have an excellent chance to live forever.”⁴⁸ Second, he saw FM-2030 as a way to break out of the restrictive conventions of names. On this account he said, “Conventional names define a person’s past: ancestry, ethnicity, nationality, religion. I am not who I was ten years ago and certainly not who I will be in twenty years.”⁴⁹ There are thus several forms of protest encompassed in his chosen name. Adding to the protest against the limit of death, he took issue with a name that would bind him to his past, further revealing him as a liminal being operating under the neoliberal ideal of ceaseless reinvention of the self. FM-2030 also took a stand against various forms of xenophobia and divisiveness, but perhaps more centrally his conflict had to do with any identity imposed upon him by the Other.

Similarly, FM-2030 disliked answering questions about his nationality or his age,⁵⁰ which he may have viewed as pinning him down into one static identity. In terms of the question of his age, according to his obituary in the New York Times “his latest artificial hip was only two years old, making the question, in his view, meaningless.”⁵¹ Regarding his nationality, he saw himself as a “global citizen, and said there were no illegal immigrants, just irrelevant borders,”⁵² eschewing even the limits or demarcations of a nation’s identity. Because FM-2030’s father had been an Iranian diplomat, by the age of 11 he had lived in 17 different countries⁵³ FM-2030’s insistence upon seeing even typically fixed identities such as age and nationality as fluid speaks to his dogged pursuit of the neoliberal ideals of constant self-reinvention.

In his teaching and writings, the work life of FM-2030 largely focused on futurist and transhuman themes. From 1979 to 1991, FM-2030 taught a seminar at the UCLA Extension

School entitled “Major Transformations: The Next 20 Years,”⁵⁴ and his unpublished works during that same period include titles such as “Countdown to Immortality.”⁵⁵ As an entrepreneur of the self, FM-2030 was known for his book, *Are You a Transhuman?: Monitoring and Stimulating Your Personal Rate of Growth in a Rapidly Changing World*.⁵⁶ Evident in the title’s use of “rate of growth” is the facet of neoliberal ideology that renders everything and everyone calculable. The phrase “monitoring and stimulating your personal rate of growth” could apply equally as well to funds invested in the stock market. Liminal states associated with personal change and transformation are therefore flattened under the rubric of an investment in the value of the self as well as commanded in perpetuity to grow and improve. “Monitoring and stimulating” also speak to a kind of science behind the ideal of endless growth in a “rapidly changing world” or Other which itself occupies a ceaselessly liminal identity. The perverse cruelty at the root of the promises of this title certainly involves the endless source of guilt produced by its readers for their failure to transform fast enough and completely enough to achieve their ideal selves.

Other speculations as to the signification of the “FM” in FM-2030’s chosen name include “Future Man”, “Future Modular”, and “Future Marvel.”⁵⁷ Regardless of whether or not it is only the “2030” or also the “FM” in his chosen name that indicates his perpetual reach toward the future, these signifiers would further tie him to the neoliberal ideal of ceaseless liminality. Some of FM-2030’s S1s would undoubtedly have been those that promised him a closer relationship to a better future, both for humanity and for himself. On his side, FM-2030 itself may have functioned at one time as an S1 and proved inevitably disappointing. So too would cryogenic suspension have operated as an S1, with its great allure being the promise of enabling eternal life (once his physical ailments could be cured and then upon the achievement of digital

immortality). It is only through his death that he could exit from the capitalist discourse—and, of course from all discourse—because his final S1 would not have the opportunity to disappoint him and create further discontents. FM-2030’s S1s for the sake of humanity (with himself included in the human species, of course), included a “Santa Claus machine [that] would produce three-dimensional objects in the manner of copying machines. This, combined with free energy from the sun, would produce limitless resources and eliminate competition.”⁵⁸ As an S1, the Santa Clause machine operated to prop up a perverse belief in the uncastrated Other. FM-2030, then, not only disavowed his own lack but also the lack in the Other.

It is, of course, rather ironic that in the capitalist discourse versions of the fantasied uncastrated Other would include limitless resources and the elimination of competition! It is worth highlighting that common disavowals of the lack in the Other occurring in our time include such beliefs in the eradication of the very competition, pollution, and racism that are clearly exacerbated and even commanded under neoliberalism. For instance, during a U.S. House hearing in early June of 2021, Texan Republican Louie Gohmert proposed an interesting solution to the climate change crisis by way of a request to Jennifer Eberlien, associate deputy chief of the Forest Service. Referencing recent significant solar storm activity, Gohmert said, “I was informed by the past director of NASA that they have found that the moon’s orbit is changing slightly and so has the Earth’s orbit around the sun...Is there anything that the national Forest Service or [Bureau of Land Management] can do to change the course of the moon’s orbit or the Earth’s orbit around the sun? Obviously, that would have profound effects on our climate.”⁵⁹ Reducing fossil fuel use and increasing renewable energy sources was clearly not on the table. Instead, amusingly evocative of the significance of the Copernican revolution, the patently absurd idea of changing the orbit of the Earth or the moon—and by the U.S. Forest

Service, no less!—reflects a disavowal of the lack in the Other of science in order to continue enjoying destructively and cruelly. Because Gohmert was speaking as a representative of the U.S., his position was also that of the split subject in the capitalist discourse who sought to deny the castration of the U.S. through the S1 of altering the orbit of the Earth or moon.

Conclusion

To review, including a harmful indifference to the environment and global welfare, there are a number of ways in which neoliberalism enacts perverse cruelties upon the speaking being, society, and even the Earth itself. The discourse of the capitalist can be considered to be perverse in a generalized way insofar as it ensures suffering through a disavowal of lack. It does so through the false promises of the S1 in the position of truth as well as through propping up a belief in eventual perfection of science. Upon obtaining an S1, it loses its value, and the agent in its disappointment is plagued with surplus-jouissance. In an endless circuit, the renewed discontents provokes the agent to reach yet again for another, different S1. This guarantee of the production of unsettling surplus jouissance is at the perverse core of the capitalist discourse. This core relates to how speaking beings suffer from commanded jouissance and a lack of the installation of desire in the capitalist discourse's perverse reduction of desire to demand. The drives are left to run wild and the primal father as cruel superegoic jouisseur reigns. Liminal beings, as one type of subjective position common under neoliberalism, suffer on all of these accounts. What is more, in their pursuit of ceaseless innovation at the level of identity, they experience the pain associated with liminal states of becoming alongside the inevitable failure to be true to their jouissance and transform as they would wish. The approach used by liminal beings to handling their singular experiences of psychological disruption and transition is therefore in opposition with the construction of and identification with a sinthome. While S1 is just another

signifier, the sinthome is a knotting together of real, symbolic, and imaginary and is thereby beyond meaning. The sinthome allows the speaking being to live through providing a singular organization of jouissance. In their perpetual drive to reinvent themselves by way of the capitalist discourse, they work against the sinthomatic solution of knotting to hold the speaking being in place.

In the construction of the neologism “sinthome” in Lacan’s 23rd seminar,⁶⁰ Lacan made use of his interpretation of the figure of the *saint homme*, holy man or saint, and it is no accident that by way of comparing the analyst with the saint that Lacan provides an answer to the crises caused by the capitalist discourse. On this account, in *Television*, Lacan said, “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.”⁶¹ Lacan compares the analyst to figure of the saint because the saint’s whose “business... is not *caritas*”⁶² and thus is not about acting for someone’s Good. Instead, the saint “acts as trash [déchets]; his business being *trashitas* [*il décharite*].”⁶³ In being *trashitas*, the analyst is situated outside of what is “in demand” under the consumeristic logic of capitalism, and this allows him to occupy the role of the object *a* as “cause of the subject’s own desire.”⁶⁴

The discourse of the analyst, then is ultimately the antidote to the discourse of the capitalist. Whereas in the capitalist discourse the speaking being does not address an other in its search for a solution to its discontents, in the analyst’s discourse a connection is forged between the agent and other, between the split subject and the object *a* or between the analysand and the analyst. Although in the capitalist discourse there is also a direct relationship with the object *a*, in that discourse it plagues the speaking being, fueling its discontents anew, only operating to motivate the subject to find yet another S1 as though the S1 really were the lost object that could

be recovered. Instead, in playing the role of object *a* as *trashitas* what the analyst installs is the desire of the speaking being that is so notably missing in the discourse of the analyst. This involves the articulation of the lack of the speaking being rather than its disavowal. In addressing the problem of its suffering to the analyst, the analysand's desire is mobilized in arriving not at the fantasmatic solution of the S1 but instead toward a *savoir-faire* regarding its surplus-jouissance through identification with the sinthome. This is indicated by the S1 as the master signifier occupying the end position of the discourse which Lacan later designated that of surplus-jouissance.

As Lacan commented, the way out of the perverse cruelties of the capitalist discourse is “only for some.”⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the alternative path of the discourse of the analyst is accessible only to those who engage in psychoanalysis. It should go without saying that in times of neoliberalism psychoanalysis is not sought out or practiced nearly as often as other forms of the talking cure, including cognitive-behavioral therapy and speaking to a priest (or other religious authority). What is more, the practice of psychoanalysis does not effect transformation of the structural inequalities promoted by neoliberalism in the name of individualism and freedom nor does it ameliorate harm done to the Earth itself.

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