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White Riot: “Logical Time” and the January 6 Riot

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I NTRODUCTION: To Anticipate

In the following paragraphs I propose to discuss the January 6 riots at the U.S. Capitol buildings with the help of Jacques Lacan’s essay “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty.” What Lacan’s essay works out for us is not simply the intersubjective nature of interiority: rather, we have the paradox that subjective agency is dependent upon some big Other, which finding is certainly germane to any political account of the riots. The assertion, as many rioters have made, that they were following Donald Trump’s orders to storm the Capitol and “fight like hell” (Feuer A16), rather than releasing rioters of individual responsibility instead extends causality to senior actors *and* to the systemic order. This assertion ticks the boxes of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, leaving the Real, or *jouissance*, untouched. Here the conundrum has to do with both the political action being diagnosed (Where was the enjoyment at the riot?) and the analytic diagnosis (How do we bring Lacan of the 1940s, kicking and screaming, into 2021?).

The usual problem, often as unacknowledged as the fact that the land on which one writes Lacanian theory is Indigenous territory, is that Lacanian theory may only awkwardly be able to fit into a political or social

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was born in Comox, British Columbia, on the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks (Satlhoot) First Nation, centred historically on kwaniwsam; he is Professor of English at Simon Fraser University. Recent academic writing often treats the COVID-19 pandemic alongside psychoanalysis, racist violence, and climate disasterism, and includes essays in *Psychoanalysis, Politics, Oppression and Resistance: Lacanian Perspectives* (Routledge, 2022), *Understanding Žižek, Understanding Modernism* (Bloomsbury 2023); *Global Pandemics and Epistemic Crises in Psychology* (Routledge 2021); and forthcoming in *symplokē*.

critique because: a) psychoanalysis is just a therapy game for the bourgeoisie; b) it's too wrapped up in private neuroses; c) Lacan's theory itself is so obscure that the working class or everyday trans person or Indigenous subject is unlikely to find it a workable text for their subjective or social needs. This critique, however, is nicely avoided in this specific text as "Logical Time," if still super complicated as a piece of writing, and in terms of its references (logical theory), provenance (some kind of 1940's existentialist parlour game), and style. To this last, of his *Écrits*, as Lacan famously said, the "[w]riting is in fact distinguished by a prevalence of the text in the sense that we will see this factor of discourse take on here—which allows for the kind of tightening up that must, to my taste, leave *the reader no other way out than the way in, which I prefer to be difficult*. This, then, will not be a writing in my sense of the term" (412, emphasis added). Commenting on this passage, Bruce Fink explores the uterine metaphor and makes the argument that Lacan forbore (or anticipated) any deconstruction of his theory. Rather, my argument in this essay will be that it is precisely the difficulty of Lacan's text, its "prevalence of the text" qua discourse, its leaving "the reader no other way out than the way in," that connects his text to the unusual (for Lacan) social dimension. That is, the "Logical Time" essay is already, on the face of it, a political analysis, dealing as it does with a version of the prisoner's dilemma which, in this case, is a cruel game whereby three prisoners are told that one of them will be freed if they follow a form of logical reasoning.

The "forced choice," as Lacan will later call it in *Seminar XVII* (Slavoj Žižek extends that trope) is akin to Robert Pfaller's discussion in *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture* regarding the delegation of guilt to the Other, a delegation achieved via "coerced games," or the "guilt of appearances," or "the naïve observer and a sense of guilt" (15–34). The historical example of this is the "Frankenburger Würfelspiel," a bloody incident during the counter-reformation when Protestant rebels were forced to play dice to decide which of them would be hanged (Pfaller 238–47). We see this dynamic in the game (Lacan's or as described by Pfaller) works similarly with today's political situation, even as we must not hastily ascribe a social or political meaning to a text (that is, Lacan's "logical time" essay) *merely because it offers such surface content*. The literature is rife with warnings against precisely this interpretive trap, from Derrida's critique of Lacan's seminar on Poe to Jameson's jape (apocryphally attributed to Freud) that a certain savage tribe decided all dreams had a sexual meaning, except those which themselves were about sex.

Lacan's essay offers a way to think time and space not so much together—for what is to be together is always a non-relation—but in terms of that conceptual synaesthesia whereby “anticipation” (to refer to the essay's complete title: “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism”) qua temporal acquires a spatial dimension. This can be explored with Lacan's wish, elaborated on below, with respect to how the essay should “resound” in a temporal dimension; as well, the sonic (but also racial) implications will be explored. The social application of the essay may apply to today's political turmoil (as Badiou argues) but also, in a more theoretical sense, helps us to understand what Cindy Zeiher, in a recent talk, alerts us to with respect to Lacan as philosopher and the value of stupidity (surely not unimportant in discussing both the Trumpian right and its smug liberal Other). This is to argue, I suggest, for a through-line that critics have located in Lacan's work of the Imaginary from “Logical Time” in the 1940s to the Borromean knots of the 1970s, which subtends, perhaps, the similarity of our essay's logical game to a well-known Keynes quip about the stock market and pretty girls. For this is to confront, head-on, the question of whether or not in Lacan the social links, relentlessly dyadic (sexual non-relation, analytic discourse, the desire of the Other) are doomed to fail: if *that* is so, perhaps the rioters enjoy being wrong. Such an insight—which is the ultimate argument of my essay—will not console us.

The set-up

Jacques Lacan's essay “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty” was first published, he tells us in a headnote to its appearance in the *Écrits*, in 1945; twenty-one years later, he adds: “May it resound with the right note here where I am placing it, between the before and the after, even if it demonstrates that the after was kept waiting [*faisait antichambre*, Bruce Fink tells us is the original French] so that the before could assume its own place [*pût prendre rang*]” (161). It is not exactly clear what “the before and the after” refer to (in immediate terms, texts before this essay in the *Écrits* date from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s; in the long historical view, Lee Edelman points to the French occupation), but the suggestion of Lacan's other great theory of time, retroactivity or *Nachträglich* or *point-de-capiton* is hard to avoid, even if that is, on the one hand, an anachronistic reading of “Logical Time,” while nonetheless, on the other hand, one sublimely permissible, given said headnote appearing *après-coup*.¹

1 Dominick Hoens tells us that Lacan rewrote the essay for its 1966 appearance in the *Écrits* (8).

What also echoes from this headnote and offers a bit of a plot spoiler for this essay (but one, let me admit, noted by Bruce Fink years ago) is the word “resound,” which, Shelia Cavanagh reminds us, also appears in an essay by James Baldwin published a year before the *Écrits*, “The White Man’s Guilt” (in *Ebony*, August, 1965) wherein he refers to the history of racism in America: “The record is there for all to read. It resounds all over the world. It might as well be written in the sky” (722).² This associative connection between Lacan and Baldwin offers, as well, a way of thinking about a racialized Lacan surely demanded by David Marriott’s *Lacan Noir*, since Baldwin tells us that racism is a record, an LP or a document, to be read, but it also resounds, which suggests more strongly the sonic, and then “might as well be” written. The structure of the “might as well be” is surely Lacanian: we say that something “might as well be” if it is treated in a certain way; if I am questioned by my son about why I eat fish if I claim to be a vegetarian, *he might as well be calling me a hypocrite*. The locution alleges a subtext, a “Why don’t you come out with what you mean?” And Baldwin’s “It might as well be written in the sky” denotes a sublime obviousness that decries the passion for ignorance that underwrites the subject. Baldwin’s tropes also suggest a contradiction: if the record is there for all to read (that is, the record of racial violence is not hidden away in an archive), but “might as well be written in the sky,” then that latter manifestation is both very public or readable (skywriting is a form of advertising, very easy to see) and also temporary, ephemeral (like that figure of right-wing paranoia, “chem trails”). The logic is productively paranoid, productive in the sense that it brings to the surface that affect, a paranoia that appertains both to the prisoners in Lacan’s game and to the January 6 rioters.

Lacan begins his essay with a story. A prison warden (a warden “of the sadistic kind,” Badiou tells us, “promoted by enlightened despotism” [248]) offers a logical problem to three prisoners: “For reasons I need not make known to you now, gentlemen, I must free one of you. In order to decide which, I will entrust the outcome to a test that you will, I hope, agree to undergo” (Lacan, “Logical Time” 161).

We have here, that is, a suggestion of what the speaker may not know, *the warden’s unconscious (the law’s unconscious)*. We all know what someone means when they say “I don’t want to get into that right now.” That’s handwaving, disavowal. And then we have two confirmations that even a

² “The White Man’s Guilt” first appeared in *Ebony*, August, 1965. The *Écrits* were published in 1966. Thanks to Sheila Cavanagh for the Baldwin reference, made during an interview on the “Rendering Unconscious” podcast.

prison warden is susceptible to *the desire of the Other*: their completion of the test will decide who gets to walk out of there free; a test he hopes they will “agree to undergo.” Of the five disks he has (three are white, two are black; the blacks will not all be used, which is the point),³ he will attach a white or black disk to each prisoner between their shoulder blades, so they cannot see their own disk, “outside, that is, your direct field.” He then leaves them “at your leisure,” certainly an odd idea of free time, first reminding them not only that they should not tell each other what colour their disks are but also that it is not in their own interest to do so, since the first person to determine their own disk’s colour (and be able to justify their guess on logical, rather than probabilistic, grounds) can leave the prison. Here we can see what Lacan will later, with the formula of sexualization, call the “logic of exception”—the escapee falling neither into the “all” of the prisoners nor the “not-all” of the feminine logic. He concludes his presentation of the problem by noting that the warden only uses the white disks. Lacan then presents the solution to the problem, with a bit of a red herring, for while he dwells on the topic of what he calls “a certain time” that it takes for the prisoners to mull over their problem, they then “take a few steps together, passing side by side through the doorway.” The red herring here is the false alliance of time and space, for it seems that the three prisoners, exiting at the same time, have stymied the logic of the exception through a spatial logic of moving at once through the doorway (“side by side”). A red herring, for soon enough Lacan will declare that “my sophism will not tolerate a spatialized conception” (166). There are two reasons for this: one has to do with the visual field (“not what the subjects see, but rather ... *what they do not see*”) and one, I assert, not yet articulated in 1945, because of his soon-to-come move away from Euclidean notions of space to other topologies which find their first elaborations in 1961–62, in the Seminar on identification (Lafont).

Lacan’s model can help us understand the January 6 riot at the Capitol in Washington D.C.: the invasion of the government building constitutes a version of the prisoners’ move through what Lacan calls the “modulations of time in the sophism’s movement: the instance of the glance, the time for comprehending, the moment of concluding” (167): that is, the rioters become subjects, through the praxis of a white riot achieved by rebelling against their government (which has insufficiently served/disciplined capital) and by realizing their white identity. To better comprehend this political conclusion, we have, first, to break down the three modulations

3 In a talk for Lacan Salon, David Marriott discusses the exclusion of the blacks.

of time; then, to understand more clearly how race is already inscribed into Lacan's sophism (and hence his theory of the subject); finally, to see how the disavowal of space in Lacan's text helps us understand how the rioters' entering *into* a building is the same as the prisoners leaving a room.

The glance is not the gaze

The first moment, the "instant of the glance," occurs when a prisoner looks at the other two prisoner's disks: they are both white. If the disks were both black, I would *know* I was white. If one was black, and I was black, then the third prisoner would know immediately that they were white. To this logic, Bruce Fink adds the following social reading:

[T]he prisoner's immediate formulation of an hypothesis that he is black reflects Lacan's early notion of underlying paranoia at the root of personality: *the other two are alike, I must be different*. Rather than stubbornly and perhaps arrogantly insisting upon some sort of racial equality or superiority, he immediately casts himself in the opposition, as the underdog, so to speak. This supposition of underdog or minority status is the motor force behind the whole reasoning process. The hypothesis in question is this very supposition. (364)

This reading is in line with that of Marriot's demand that we question—via Fanon—what in Lacan is meant by structure: "And what does it mean to say that it [structure] has a topology of surfaces—a transition that forms a knot" and, further, "How is blackness a symptom" (Marriot 54)?⁴ Here we can see, *in nuce*, both the fallacy of the (primarily) white rioters in seeing themselves as underdog à la the Black man but also the way that (what is fundamentally) paranoia itself helps us understand the spatial—or topological—dimension of the logical game and the rioters' symptoms (which is to say their *sinthome* or signifier penetrated by enjoyment).

Indeed, is not this structure of suppositions the very basis of the January 6 rioters? Consider Mark Danner's description of Trump's speech that day and the crowd's reaction:

We have come to demand that Congress do the right thing
... We fight. We fight like hell, and if you don't fight like hell,
you're not going to have a country anymore.

⁴ Please see, as well, my review of *Lacan Noir*, in the fall/winter 2022 issue of *Postcolonial Text*.

Deafening paroxysms of jubilation and rage greeted this doctrinal statement of Trumpism, for who could better summarize the philosophy, such as it was, in fewer words? Trump as Rambo, as tank commander, motorcycle gang leader, and on and on. The imagery of Trumpism is about strength and cruelty and dominance even as the rhetoric is about loss and grievance and victimization: about what was taken and what must be seized back by strength. And we would have to bring that strength, for certain it was that the politicians would turn out to be traitors, just like all the rest. From that fateful ride down the gilt staircase in the pink-marbled lobby of Trump Tower five years before—Trumpism’s March on Rome—it had been about this: “Taking back the country.” Taking it back from the rapists and the killers, the undocumented and the illegitimate, the Black and the brown from “shithole countries” who should go back “where they came from.” Now it had all come down to this. (np)

So Washington in 2021.

“Do we know what we are doing?” Zeiher

And here Lacan: “I will now place myself under the auspices of he who sometimes dons the *philosopher’s* garb, who—ambiguous—is more often to be sought in the *comedian’s* banter, but who is always encountered in the *politician’s* secretive action: the good *logician*, odious to the world” (“Logical Time” 163). This is where the work of Cindy Zeiher is useful. In her lecture, “Sensation(all) Ontology,” Zeiher argues that the question of how viable psychoanalysis is has to do with an ontological sense of the past, an ontology that is both spatially non-orientable and riven with enjoyment. Knowledge is fundamentally a question of how to think the inside and the outside, Zeiher tells us—a problematic surely at work for the January 6 rioters when viewed via “logical time,” for one group seeks to *enter* a building, while the other to *exit* a room. Indeed, we require the January 6 riot to understand that “Logical Time” is a topological problem of extimacy, or the way in which our most intimate consciousness is exterior to us (Pavón-Cuellar 661). We enter or exit these spaces in search of knowledge—the rioters were philosophers, it seems—in search of the signifier qua *objet petit a*, for we cannot admit that we know nothing. Rather, we do not know, and hence proceed through enjoyment to the symptom: we keep repeating, Zeiher tells us, drawing on Freud, *without* knowing it; we repeat without knowing but with full knowledge that we don’t know some or all. Hence, in a Badiou moment, Zeiher calls for “the

Knowledge is
fundamentally a
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inside and the
outside.

fidelity to repeat.” Here Freud’s comments from “Remember, Repeating, and Working Through” are germane:

What interests us most of all is naturally the relation of this compulsion to repeat to the transference and to resistance. We soon perceive that the transference is itself only a piece of repetition, and that the repetition is a transference of the forgotten past not only on to the doctor but also on to the other aspects of the current situation. We must be prepared to find, therefore, that the patient yields to the compulsion to repeat, which now replaces the impulsion to remember, not only in his personal attitude to his doctor but also in every other activity and relationship which may occupy his life at the time—if, for instance, he falls in love or undertakes a task or starts an enterprise during the treatment. The part played by resistance, too, is easily recognized. The greater the resistance the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering. (151)

That is, as signaled by the U.S. Democrats’ slogan “build back better,” or the pandemic utterance “return to normal,” the symptom promises a better jouissance. For we thrive on jouissance since, as we tell the analyst about the anguish of our symptom, we enjoy our symptom—get off on it, Zeiher reminds us, as Lacan provocatively proposes in *Seminar VII*:

Suppose, says Kant, that in order to control the excesses of a sensualist, one produces the following situation. There is in a bedroom the woman he currently lusts after. He is granted the freedom to enter that room to satisfy his desire or his need, but next to the door through which he will leave there stands the gallows on which he will be hanged. But that’s nothing, and is certainly not the basis of Kant’s moral; you will see in a moment where the key to the proof is. As far as Kant is concerned, it goes without saying that the gallows will be a sufficient deterrent; there’s no question of an individual going to screw a woman when he knows he’s to be hanged on the way out. (108)

Enjoyment is key to understanding why the rioters acted out, why they rioted, if they knew they would be “hanged on the way out.” Even as the question of not knowing, or stupidity, continues to give enjoyment, the pain inherent in jouissance begins to intrude, as the original function of symptom (trauma) provides a way forward. Inhabiting the uncanny, like a vortex, or a riptide, the subject, Zeiher tells us, is aware of being caught.

(Zeihner is a surfer, so that may account for the metaphor of the riptide, but such a trope applies equally well to the January 6 crowd.) Here we have the rioter in their hysteric's discourse, with the master as extimate Other. The rioter realizes better than the psychoanalyst that we are not subjects of knowledge but of jouissance and that if we enjoy our symptom this position is surely vitalistic and stupid, for there is nothing enjoyable about it. Or, to be more specific, *knowledge* of one's symptom is not mutual recognition but misrecognition.

What does the riot tell us about the relation between language, knowledge, research, the university discourse? First, that there exists a resistance or disavowal with respect to knowledge and the repression of not knowing. Knowledge as an object entails curiosity as desire and an ontological extimate space as drive. As subjects of knowledge our experience is limited: we repeat without knowing but with full knowledge that we don't know some or all. Knowledge is a kind of stupidity, for we initially know nothing but have language. We seek truth to short-circuit knowledge, which is so violent, structured topologically as it is, like a Möbius strip: knowledge has more to do with sensation (repetition) than sense, Zeihner tells us.

*Comprenoire!*⁵

But as we leave this knowledge-based instant of the glance, keep in mind, too, Lacan's admonition that it is a matter of "not what the subjects see, but rather ... *what they do not see*." And indeed, this is where so much analysis of, and our fixation with, January 6 remains: the imaginary of the so-called "Q Anon Shaman" (Jake Angeli) or Donald Trump Jr as described by Mark Danner: "With his slicked-back hair, open-necked shirt, and gaping jacket, he looked for all the world like a just-past-his-prime used-car salesman" (np). This may be to render the "Logical Time" essay into the discourse of the *Four Fundamentals*, as summarized by Joan Copjec when she argues that for Lacan "beyond the signifying network, beyond the visible field, there is, in fact, nothing at all ... [I]t is what the subject does not see and not simply what it sees that founds it" (35–36). Even if the prisoner (the rioter) thinks he knows he is white, he cannot see his whiteness. This is the corollary to the ten theses on whiteness offered by Ian Williams in *Disorientation: Being Black in the World* (42–58), and, in particular, the tenth thesis: "Whiteness is obsessed with Blackness,"

5 From Lacan's *Seminar IV*, in which a translator's note remarks: "Initially used in dialects in Western France before becoming more widespread in the early twentieth century, the informal term *comprenoire* and its sister term *comprenette* denote the faculty of understanding or mental grasp" (441).

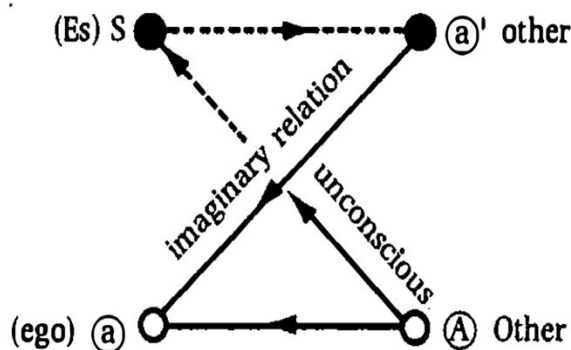
where Williams elaborates: “The invisibility of whiteness—no, the blindness of whiteness—is so profound that whiteness relies on Blackness to understand itself” (57).

Then, we have the second moment, the time for comprehending. This “certain time,” Lacan tells us, “is defined (in the two senses of taking on meaning and finding its limit)” (168). Now, I was first interested in re-reading “Logical Time” for thinking about the January 6 riot after encountering Jamieson Webster’s discussion of how that essay helped her think about the COVID-19 pandemic. For Webster, this second moment of time was that

in which I try to comprehend myself together with and among others. So much information crowds in during this time without any conclusion to our own dilemmas of imprisonment—about which of us can leave, how many are infected, what has happened in past viral outbreaks, what the others are saying (statistics, statistics, and more statistics, experts, experts, and more experts). (np)

That is, I understand Lacan to be saying that the time of comprehending is “defined” (both taking on a meaning and having a limit or edge) insofar as Webster describes the flurry of *trying* to comprehend. Her trying is a genuine and honest effort. We cannot say the same for the January 6 rioters.

For, as in the prison game, it is those *others* who reassure the subject, in Lacan’s telling, wherein “each of the whites find the key to his own problem in the inertia of his semblable” (168). For Lacan, the subject takes solace in the other trying to figure things out: like the internet conspiracy theorist, or the January 6 rioter surrounded by “Don’t Tread on Me” flags and MAGA hats and, of course, nooses and gibbets. This is the flip side to the paranoia evinced in Bruce Fink’s gloss and why Fink will drag out the L-schema to talk about the imaginary axis; it is also why Dominick Hoens argues that Lacan’s placement of this essay in the *Écrits* marks the boundary between his theorizing (in the 1930s and 1940s) of the imaginary and that of the (more properly 1950s) Symbolic, which I argue is indicated in the huggy-kissy side of the rioters, even down to the perhaps apocryphal stories of mugging for selfies with the police.



L-schema. In Lacan, *Seminar II* 243.

Lacan argues that our subjectivity is constituted by the imaginary versus symbolic/unconscious, but what is key to the schema is that the symbolic and the imaginary are not just different axes but that they cross. In the 1950s, when the role of the clinic is to move the analysand from the imaginary to symbolic, Lacan is still positing a constitutive antagonism. That is, the imaginary is the noise effecting the message of the big Other. The L-schema is, in Lacanian terms, essentially about the Lacan of the imaginary, of recognition, and it is not properly speaking the Lacan of the signifier, of the symbolic, let alone the real. Here we can think of the story of a former Energy Department federal contractor whose acquittal was the first defeat for the team pursuing charges on more than seven-hundred-and-seventy rioters (Hsu). Matthew Martin said he was “waved in” by police. Here the L-schema, and in particular the imaginary axis a - a' , is helpful. Or, rather, the predominance of the imaginary in the schema shows the problem of the role of the big Other on January 6 and, indeed, confirms the rioters in their racialized whiteness. Essentially, for Martin, who is white, the police were not the big Other but instead the little a' (which is not the same as the *object a*, which had not been developed by Lacan at the time of the L-schema’s appearing in the 1950s), the mirror image of the ego or *moi*. Lacan’s commentary on the graph in 1955, however, is instructive:

S is the letter S, but it’s also the subject, the analytic subject, that is to say not the subject in its totality. People spend their time plaguing us about taking it in its totality. Why should it be a whole? We haven’t the faintest idea. Have you ever encountered whole beings? Perhaps it’s an ideal. I’ve never

“The act takes
precedence over
the reasoning.”

seen any. I’m not whole; neither are you. If we were whole, we would each be in our corners, whole, we wouldn’t be here, together, trying to get ourselves into shape, as they say. It is the subject, not in its totality, but in its opening up. As usual, he doesn’t know what he’s saying. If he knew what he was saying, he wouldn’t be there. He [that is, the A or big Other/Autre, in the diagram] is there, down on the right. (*Seminar II* 243)

For the rioter who has got off scot-free, he has also avoided an encounter with the big Other, and also, presumably, with the jouissance that would attend, according to Zeiher, his stupidity. And so Adrien Johnston, writing on “Logical Time,” has argued that there is a certain bookending that the Imaginary carries out in Lacan’s work. Johnston begins with the role according to which, ventriloquizing Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, he says “the Imaginary ... is the true substratum of the Lacanian subject,” adding the qualification that it is Borch-Jacobsen’s “failure to understand” the logical time essay that leads to this argument (Johnston 30). But this through-line of the Imaginary extends to Lacan’s late assertion, in *Seminar XXII* of 1974–75, that the Borromean knot is to be situated in the register of the Imaginary:

I am putting forward something which is nowhere going to be conjugated with a transcendental aesthetic. It is on the contrary because the Borromean knot belongs to the Imaginary, namely, supports the triad of the Imaginary, of the Symbolic and of the Real, it is in so far as this triad exists, from the fact that there is joined to it the addition of the Imaginary, that space qua sensible finds itself reduced to this minimum of three dimensions, in other words from its attachment to the Symbolic and to the Real. (15)

Too, for Johnston, Lacan falls into a kind of perspectivalism whereby the position of *le grand Autre* (either the prison warden or the prisoner at the moment of concluding) is privileged (28, 35), thereby sidelining the temporality of the decision. Indeed, there seems to be no real time in the third moment; as Webster puts it, “You give yourself over to history, even as you make your own declaration manifest.” This is also Badiou’s take on Lacan’s essay in *Theory of the Subject*, in his notion of hurrying (“The act takes precedence over the reasoning” (257); this is, however, where his Leninism or Maoism comes closer to a Trumpian logic, since he also remarks that “a

knucklehead is a disorder in reasoning, no?” (256) or, as Pluth and Hoens quote in the title of their essay, “What if the Other is stupid?”

Concluding and yet not yet

But I want to turn, for this consideration of the moment of concluding, back to the logic that Lacan asserts throughout this experiment. First, using the language of linguistics (as he says), he offers the syllogism of *pro-tasis* (if the other has a certain coloured disc) ... *apodosis* (then I know my disc is a certain colour) ... and then arriving at a *hypothesis* (167, 169)—or the moment of concluding. But is this reasoning (as he claims he wants) or something else? If the “assertive judgment is an act” (170)—but perhaps a hasty act, overhasty if one is surrounded by idiots, then the “subjective assertion as the fundamental form of a collective logic” (173) and the subject is anterior (a fundamental Lacanian precept, but in our literature today, asserted both by Hoens and by Fink). Derek Hook adds a useful insight to the “Logical Time” library of commentary in his argument, in an essay on subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, and the trans-subjective: he states that the third level of interaction is this level of not just anticipating what the other thinks but what the other thinks others think (11).

Oddly similar, is it not, to the famous Keynes beauty contest model of the stock market, where one doesn’t choose the prettiest face, or even the face we think others will think is the prettiest, but the face that we think others will expect others to think is the prettiest (Wikipedia; see also Žižek)? A later version of the contest was run on NPR’s *planet money*, although with animal videos rather than pictures of women (Wikipedia), but this politically correct version misses (gentrifies?) the libidinal aspect of the Keynesian contest, not unlike the libidinal aspect of the prisoner’s dilemma that is reintroduced by the Capitol riot.

It is this libidinality of the riot that I want to turn to next by way of a conclusion. Discussing some of these issues with Jamil Khader, I remarked that for an orthodox Lacanian, any notion of the social is problematic since it is rooted in the imaginary. Consider Alberto Toscano’s critique, that “a certain dislocated, maladaptive, voided subject—the subject of psychoanalysis—has been rendered normative and congruent with the institutions” of the neoliberal state (150). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, social links always fail/are dyadic: sexual relation, analyst/analysand, parent/child. With Freud, we have a theory of group psychology,⁶ and it may be that

6 Which, like the Le Bon it draws on, begins with the analogy of the crowd and contagion, a reading useful in the pandemic era.

Lacanian have to turn back to that body of thought to better understand the January 6 riot and its libidinal aspect.

If for Lacan the point of the exercise was to demonstrate the role of haste in logic (*Écrits* 175 n1), but also of that haste in constituting the logic of the collective, here we can widen the lens and turn back to the figures in that riot that day and wonder how collective they already were. According to police and media reports, of the four-hundred-plus rioters charged, roughly fifty were already members of such self-styled radical groups as the Proud Boys, or Oath Keepers, or Super Happy Fun America, and seventy were current or former members of the military, police, government (needless to say, some no doubt belonged to both categories—extreme right and police/military/government). This libidinality of the collective, however, must be found elsewhere, that is, not in pre-existing alt-right social groups, not in the “mob” as some vitalist trope but, rather, in the historic events of that day itself: the ratification of the vote, preceding the inauguration of the U.S. president. Consider the role of the symbolic here that is being interrupted: as Derek Hook remarks, there is both a hastening and a time-lag in the assuming of symbolic identity (17–18). Further, he adds, “The fact of (trans-subjective) symbolic performance as condition of (subjective) belief can be illustrated via the social rituals that must be obeyed in the public lives of people of great historical or political importance. In fact, the more illustrious or elevated the symbolic position, the more elaborate the performative rituals tend to become, at least historically” (18). And, of course, the symbolic position was precisely such an “elaborate ... performative ritual,” the joint session of Congress for the purposes of counting Electoral College ballots, the final step to confirm President-elect Joe Biden’s victory in the 2020 presidential election over incumbent President Donald Trump (Wikipedia). Here it is useful, as Žižek remarks in his comments on the “Logical time” essay in *The Indivisible Remainder* (133–36), to read Lacan “backwards,” applying concepts that are only developed later (135), in this case Lacan’s comments in *Seminar IX*: “[T]he fact that the subject is mistaken (*se trompe*), is undoubtedly for us, analysts just as much as philosophers, [comedians just as much as politicians], *the inaugural experience*” (Lesson of 7 March 1962).

This founding mistake of the subject, the hastening to knowledge, is based, first, qua what the other thinks others think, which Hook identifies as the big Other, the collective subject arrived at *not* through the nefarious radicalization of hard right groups but through the elaborate performative ritual, a logical time that only offers white disks, but allows its prisoners

who escape to believe they are the minority, the maligned, that allows them, indeed, to believe that they have escaped and to enjoy being wrong.

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