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**Identity in a time of loneliness.  
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Usually, in my presentations and papers, I present a close reading of Lacan combined with Freud on a particular subject. Today, I will proceed differently, as I want to present a general view, informed by Lacan and Freud, on what I think is going wrong today in matters of identity and love life. Alternative titles for this talk might have been “The Other does exist” or, if you want a more sexy title, “The naked body”.

Contrary to popular opinion, love is rather easy to define. It is a signifier, meaning that it is determined by the Other. It belongs to the same league as femininity and authority, and that is why Lacan could state that all of these do not exist. He could have added the subject as well, as a kind of ever shifting product of these signifiers. The contemporary changes in the Other and its effects on subjectivity is the theme of my talk, as seen from a West-European continental point of view.

History has seen a number of fundamental changes in our way of life. The transition from hunter-gatherers to sedentary farming was the most important one, followed by the industrial revolution. What we have seen in the last few decades with digital technology is the ever growing apogee of what was initially only a mechanical revolution. Its effects on the flow of information, on education, health, production and globalisation cannot be overrated, together with the accompanying acceleration. We can be contacted almost everywhere at any time, we can click-on any piece of information, quality education is possible for both men and women, we have never been so healthy for such a long time, etc. In this cool, objective light, the balance sheet is positive, albeit restricted to what is called “the west” and with a limited ecological validity. Concerning the latter, I can ease the reader’s mind. The idea that mankind will destroy the planet, is wrong. That idea forms part of the problem – hubris combined with short sight. We will not destroy the world, only ourselves.

Right from the start of the industrial age, the accompanying psychological problems received attention. The reflections of S.Marai on the influence of modern society on man are so contemporary that most of his readers are hardly aware of the fact that they were written more than half a century ago. Recently, these problems took a paradoxical form: the first generation who never suffered hunger, let alone war and who lived an unknown level of prosperity, is at the same time the generation with the highest amount of depression and the highest suicide rate. The many explanations put forward illustrate our lack of understanding. In the wake of Freud’s monograph on mourning and melancholia, part of the explanation must be found in identity, or, more specifically, in its decline.

Not so long ago, identity spoke for itself, and even in psychoanalytic theory, it was hardly a concept, let alone a problem (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2008). Insofar as

it was studied, the focus was on its structure, often in combination with developmental psychological accents. Today, this is no longer the case, on the contrary. Identity has become a problem, and the so-called personality disorders are everywhere. Before going deeper into this change, I have to correct a certain misunderstanding that paradoxically enough is disguised as a definition of identity, whilst it illustrates the problem.

Today, identity is usually understood as an indication for a supposedly unique I or narcissistic ego, the “god in the deepest of my thoughts”, independent of all those other ego’s. Such an understanding testifies far more to the loss of identity, to my being thrown back on my own and the ensuing loss of security and safety. In contrast to this understanding, identity refers to the reassuring feeling of forming part of a group to which I am more or less identical – the Latin root *Identitas* means similarity. Moreover, in most cases somebody forms part of several groups that are connected between themselves and exist in their own right as well, based on a certain communality: gender, family, profession, village, nation.... Every one of these receives a common denominator, often condensed in a proper name. Your family name refers to your family group that might be associated to the name of the village or city, or even the nation from which you originate. Immediately following this, we find groups based on certain characteristics such as gender and profession.

Every subject carries these identities with him or her, and precisely because of this charge, we know who we are within a given stability and continuity. Permanency is based on history, from family stories to the history of a professional group, a people, a nation... I am somebody because I belong to an identifiable group of somebody’s who left their traces through history, the beaten track that I can follow. Based on its history, every group produces a number of norms and values that have to be followed by the individual if it wants to take the identity of this particular group.

This demonstrates a second importance of the Other, besides identity: it is via the group that drive regulation is acquired, together with meaning. To form part of a group implies accepting these regulations and sharing these meanings. Assuming that religion is just one of the many identity providing and drive regulating groups, there is no intrinsic pre-given or pre-discursive meaning and every subject has to take care of that him or herself. It is impossible to do so on one’s own, with the exception of the psychotic subject. For the rest of us, the Other is strictly necessary.

Both Freud and Lacan demonstrated that regulation and meaning have to be carried by and in number of instances incarnated by a symbolic authority who receives a special position in the group. Its necessary character is caused by the fact that both meaning and norms are always arbitrary and consequently have to be based on a convention shared by the group members, with the leader or leaders as guarantee. The historical *pater patrias* or founding father finds its counterpart in the *pater* or *mater familias*, who is supposed to follow the law to its letter. Besides the written law there are always a number of unwritten, but no less important regulations. Beyond all their different forms and elaborations, there is a common kernel: they determine the relation towards the body, be it one’s own body or the body of somebody else, going from eating etiquette, clothing norms, kinship rules of engagement to eroticism and gender relations – see the works of Lévi-Strauss.

Indeed, the body takes a central position, both in matters of regulation and identity. At the end of the day, every regulation focuses on jouissance (see Freud’s super-ego) and identity is nothing but meaning draped over the bodily surface (see Freud’s Ego as a body surface) via clothing and status symbols. The latter are

important because they refer to the symbolically determined narrative identity that tells us and the other who we are and how we relate ourselves to the others. Without it, we would literally not know who we are. This is what Lacan has explained in his theory of the mirror stage and subject formation.

Based on the hitherto given description, it has already become clear that belonging to a stable group is very important and if this belonging becomes undermined, it means that subject formation, drive regulation and meaning will be undermined as well. This is happening today, from so-called identity disorders in borderline patients to the loss of identity in cases of depression, both of which are accompanied by a never absent loss of meaning and an always present anxiety. Because of this deterioration, the previously underlying body is nowadays placed in the foreground, in the best of cases as a framework for an identity that still needs to be built, in the worst of cases as the last part of a disappearing subjectivity that was never really elaborated. This is the suicide via which somebody who was already not there anymore, disappears completely from the scene.

### *Anonymous individuals*

The formation of stable groups gives rise to a number of feelings that speak for themselves: loyalty and trust, belief in authority and solidarity. Originally, these were mainly installed via kinship groups; until recently, they were also realised in the work place. The industrial revolution made most of us dependent on the economy, meaning that its determining force cannot be overrated. The assumption is that the economy via its effects on groups determines the individual and his sense of identity.

A general description of what has meanwhile been called “the new capitalism” can be found in Sennett (2007). The combination between digitalisation and the internet, neoliberalism and the seduction of the stock-market, both for companies and for John Doe who wants his piece of the cake, have installed in a very short time a completely new company culture – the Other of the capitalist discourse, as Lacan described it in 1972. Because of the dominating power of the industry, this discourse was soon enough taken over by the state administration, especially in matters of health care and education. Its combined effects on society, family life and finally the individual are enormous and illustrate perfectly how economy, politics and subjectivity are intermixed. It is this mixture that I want to illustrate briefly in matters of time management, the importance of knowledge and experience, the combination between loyalty and solidarity, and last but not least, the position of authority. Their final effects will emerge especially in the combined process of identity acquisition and drive regulation, and consequently in our love life.

Contemporary management aims at short term profits, just like our politicians are only thinking in terms of one legislative period. This means that short term fluctuations on the stock market have the same effect on economics as pop polls on politics: fast and drastic interventions in function of the “market”. It won’t take long before continuity and stability become dirty words, indicating what you shouldn’t aim for. On the individual level, this creates insecurity and exhaustion. Everybody has to keep growing, every evaluation interview has to result in ever higher aims and it is specifically forbidden to stay at the previous level. ADHD has become the norm and flexibility its credo. A slogan like “The world, my village” might better be replaced by “The world, a railway station,” where people are running around and don’t manage to find the right track because the time table was changed yet again.

This explains why such an economy cannot cherish experience and knowledge; such assets cause too much stagnation and resistance to change. Instead of that, the accent shifts towards so-called competences, innovation and glamour (“attractiveness”) in function of the stock market notation. Elderly workers are considered to be a burden: their knowledge hampers fast progress, their salaries are too high, they are too opinionated and their flexibility is none – get rid of them is the message. Its mirror image on the political scene is thanking the faithful party members for their efforts and filling their safe election seats with a mix of macho actors, soft porn actresses and sportsmen. The analogy on the individual level is easy to find. Everyone has to look eternally young and willing and we buy things because they are new and not because we need them. Things are thrown away because they are old, not because we can’t use them any more.

The combination between a tendency towards short term profits and a decreasing appreciation of knowledge and experience results in the dissolution of the glue that held groups together, i.e., loyalty and solidarity. In the light of what is happening today, the previous generations (by and large those after world war II) knew a far reaching loyalty between “upstairs” and “downstairs”. A worker was more or less assured of a life long job with the same boss, and consequently he was prepared to engage in that job and for “his” boss – indeed, he was part of it. This boss would engage himself for “his” people, because that was to the best of his interests. This has almost disappeared today, together with the company and the boss. A multinational company is invisible, has no contact with its workers and will displace, cut down, increase jobs in function of the stock market. Consequently the workers don’t have any feeling of loyalty anymore, and the relationship between upstairs and downstairs is one of distrust. Again, the translation in matters of politics is quite easy. The number of loyal party members is decreasing everywhere, and with each election the number of undecided voters is on the rise. Those who vote have to be convinced in the short term, a longer engagement is rather exceptional. This, in its turn, leads to the use of cheap arguments. Symptomatic of the loss of loyalty is the cynical style used by party bonzes when in private talking about their voters, and of course this is perfectly mirrored by the open cynics used by John Doe when talking about politicians.

When the vertical loyalty between upstairs and downstairs is lacking, the horizontal solidarity will disappear very fast as well. An almost exclusive tendency towards fast or simply more profit implies the rejection of everything that stands in the way. Consequently, every *body* is confronted with the threatening image of potential redundancy – there is always somebody who is better, faster and cheaper. In such a discourse, it is inevitable that colleagues become rivals and that solidarity is a luxury that you can’t afford. On the political scene as well, building a common party program is something of the past, and the main enemies have to be looked for in one’s own ranks. The next step is that this combined disappearance of loyalty and solidarity is felt on the level of the smallest group, which is the family. Our contemporary love life is a very strange one. Partners distrust each other from the start; try to protect themselves against possible fraud via complex marriage contracts, keeping separate saving accounts from day one, etc. In case of a conflict, negotiations are no real option, get packing and go, because flexibility is better, and more often than not, a new and supposedly better product, that is, a new partner is already waiting. Indeed, there is always somebody better, faster and cheaper than you.

The resulting balance is rather pessimistic. Durability is bad (“Are you *still* working with X?” “Are you *still* together with Y?”), elaborating a common long term

project is impossible. Distrust is obligatory (“I will not be used, on the contrary, I will use them!”) and solidarity is nothing but a tax deductible item (“Why should I have to take care of you?”). The whole thing bathes in a sphere of general tiredness, chronic lack of time and, most importantly, in a sense of loss. Instead of the given although ever alienating identity of the previous discourse, the contemporary subject is haunted by basic questions: who am I, in relation to whom?

A last feature of this new capitalism is less visible but has far reaching consequences as well. The centre of power that used to be very clear – the boss, the office – has not only left the company, it has become anonymous as well. The new economy operates on the international stock market and is run by nameless board meetings. This leads inevitably to the replacement of authority by pure power. The always temporary top manager has to do what the market and the board tell him to do, and a national government is not able to counter these decisions, even if they mean closing down a lucrative factory. In our century, a national government is the perfect incarnation of E.A.Poe’s “Mister Waldemar”: he’s dead without being aware of it.

This anonymous aspect of power is threatening precisely because it is anonymous. Anybody who wants to protest today is in dire trouble because it is quite difficult to find an address for this protest, thus adding to feelings of impotence. This is mirrored on the level of the family as well, where the seat of authority has been empty for several decades. In the worst of cases, the children literally don’t know under which common denominator they have to place themselves. They are the exponents of the contemporary growing anonym. It is no coincidence that every clinician is talking about the necessity for safe attachments. The group of people with an unsafe attachment is growing all the time. Unsafe attachment is not entirely the correct expression, in most cases it means that these people don’t have attachments, they are anonymous individuals in a time of loneliness. In such circumstances, it is not a surprise that the body is put forward, to the centre of the scene, as the anchoring place for an identity that still needs to be constructed.

### *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*

We are our body, but we are not only our body. I read in my newspaper the obituary of an unknown man. I learn that he was born in Ghent in 1942 on February the 11<sup>th</sup>, that he was the partner of a deeply sorrowed wife, a loving father of three children, a grandfather of two grandchildren, and that he died peacefully at home in the presence of his family. He himself was the son of a couple whose names are marked with a cross. In a few lines, four generations make their appearance. I learn that he was an architect, member of several societies and deeply religious. This condensed description provides me with an image of the identity that clothed this dead body. The obituary by itself illustrates how we try to continue our identity beyond the frontiers of death. Without this identity, the subject does not exist; it is just a body, meaning that we end in the way that we have started.

Clothing, in the literal and figurative meaning, determines our identity and convention determines how this clothing and hence this identity must look. Such determination goes much further than the body image and even than the body awareness – these provide only the starting points for the Other to construct the subject. Today, it seems as if we don’t get much further than these starting points in

their most elementary forms. If you read in the newspaper that a political program is not sexy enough, then you know what time it is.

A recent famous television documentary ("In Europe", by Geert Mak) showed us images of the previous century, e.g., of the student protests in the late sixties. Even in colour, the black, grey and white are very dominating. We have to assume that the marching men are in their early twenties, but they all look much older. Moreover, they don't seem very healthy and their body shapes are not very appealing either. This comes as no surprise, as their main sporting activity came down to debating evenings with lots of cigarettes and alcohol. Their identity was based on the position provided by their studies in combination with the fact that they belonged to a number of other classic groups as well. Half a century later, this has completely changed. The majority of the students are female, colour is everywhere and almost everybody (professors included) are following a fitness program. The latter goes for about everybody in the west: the body takes the central scene in a way that was not so long ago literally unthinkable. It has to meet a number of compelling norms (young and beautiful, sexy and provocative), and in cases where fitness, body sculpting and diet don't help any more, there is always plastic surgery.

The rational explanation for this change is that our times recognise health as represented by a pleasant appearance. The less rational explanation is that this is a desperate way to be some – body and to get recognition. If the symbolic determination of the subject is increasingly disappearing because the groups that founded this determination are disappearing, then we are left with two possibilities. One can start looking for new groups that might provide us with an identity. And/or one can fall back on the naked body, as a basis for an exchange with the others and for a position in that exchange. In both cases, the subject-to-be is desperately looking for a big Other who is willing to provide a story for his life, just like the six characters in the prophetic piece by Pirandello.

The search for new identity providing groups is happening almost everywhere today. The disappearance of nations and their accompanying identity in the as yet faceless Europe has caused an ever growing wave of regionalism. In combination with football hooliganism, this is the soft version of a movement that becomes grimmer for those who fall between the folds of nations and history. The emptier someone's identity is, the more the need will be for a rigorous group, and as a consequence of that every form of fundamentalism – be it Christian, Jewish or Muslim – becomes attractive. Once somebody is accepted into such a group, doubt disappears. The subject is told who he is, where the authority resides, how one has to handle one's own body and the body of the other, what the common goal is and how one can contribute to this goal. At last, security and certainty. Finally, the body has become a subject, even in such a convincing way that it is prepared to sacrifice this body. And in case a benevolent scientist with the best possible intentions comes to explain that God, Allah or Jahweh did not create the world in seven days, then his explanation will be very convincing for the further reinforcement and cohesion of the group. Religion provides identity; science doesn't.

### *The naked body*

If this option (to become part of a fundamentalist group) is not possible, the character in search of an author/the subject in search of the Other has no other choice than to fall back on its body, as the bare base for identity. Even then, the case remains that

some-body can only be a subject in and via the relation towards another some-body; by itself no-one can be a subject. Anne Frank needed her Kitty and Tom Hanks his Wilson (Cast Away). When the process of subject formation is limited to its bodily substrate, this necessarily implies a relapse to the most elementary form of interaction, namely sex and sexual attractiveness. Again, this is most prominently present for those who fell between the folds of history and nations, albeit this time especially for women. The number of young East-European women who are trying desperately to acquire a position and hence an identity in the west via their body, is also an effect of the new economy. In itself, this phenomenon is nothing but an enhanced form of what is already happening everywhere, albeit in a more banal way.

In this way, identity is reduced to sexual identity. The fact that a convincing gender definition based on culture has disappeared implies a reversal to a biological determination. Put in simple terms, this means a relapse to all those features that have to do with procreation: youth and strength, combined with the correct bodily proportions and clear complexion, all of which must be clearly exhibited. "Me Tarzan, you Jane", this seems to be the new love formula. Unfortunately, this is not enough for a stable sense of identity, precisely because it is not backed up by a symbolic determination. The feeling of not being masculine enough, not being feminine enough has taken dramatic proportions. This contradicts in a painful way the illusion that certainty in these matters is to be found in the naked reality itself. Somebody, indeed *some – body* is a man or a woman, biologically speaking, this can almost never be doubted. But am I manly enough, or womanly enough? In order to find sufficient certainty, we have to address ourselves to the stable groups in our culture, and their definition of masculine and feminine. Now that these groups are destabilized and their definition has no authority anymore, uncertainty is the rule. Instead of the traditional groups, the contemporary "glossies" are producing answers in the form of questions on their front-page. "What is your ideal weight?"; "What size should your breasts be?", and the like. The so-called gender dysphoria has in the meantime received a new accent. The increasing uncertainty in matters of the symbolic determination of gender has left a growing number of youngsters with an impossibility to make a choice, thus condemning them to the no-man's-land of bisexuality. In her Ph.D., P.Gherovici demonstrated very aptly that this is the contemporary form of the classic hysterical question concerning gender: "Am I bisexual or not?" In my reading, this is yet again an indication for the loss of an identity providing discourse. If becoming a man or becoming a woman becomes unclear, then lingering between the two and not making a choice is inevitable. Obviously, Lacan's metaphor concerning the two children on the train passing the toilets and asking themselves whether they are arriving at "Dames" or at "Messieurs", won't do any more, and will need to be supplemented with a third choice, or more correctly, the absence of a choice.

The rise of bisexuality as an effect of the relapse to a biological determination of the sexual identity is very paradoxical, to say the least of it. This is all the more so the case because our generation is the first to have effective contraceptives at its disposal; now sexuality and procreation can be disconnected. At precisely the time where we don't need to worry anymore about undesired pregnancies, we are returning to an over accentuation of all the characteristics that have to do with procreation, for lack of a symbolically determined gender identity.

Independently of this, the introduction of effective contraceptives had a number of very important implications. First and foremost the fact that nowadays a woman can consciously chose her education and career, thus endorsing

emancipation in a massive way. The price to pay is that they are also subjected to all the lovely effects of the new economy, as described above. Secondly, the disconnection between sex and procreation has greatly influenced sexual interaction, e.g., the age boundaries defining the possibility of sex have shifted considerably, in both directions. Younger people start having sex at an ever earlier age, and with the increased health and lifespan, sex is both a pleasurable activity and a tricky business with elderly people. There was a time when parents were worrying whether their children were already doing "it," nowadays children are worrying whether their remaining elderly parent have started doing "it" again, if only for the fact that their inheritance could fall into the wrong hands.

The most important effect of this technical disconnection is that this is the first generation of women in human history for which sex may equal pleasure, freed from the anxiety of yet another pregnancy or worse, of death at childbirth. At that point, alas, an atavistic anxiety arises, especially in men. In his last theory on the Oedipal complex (in seminar XVII), Lacan notes that the neurotic subject experiences *jouissance* as something threatening, and that the classic oedipal solution comes down to a defensive role distribution, with the mother receiving the part of the impossible *jouissance* and the father the role of the great prohibitor. Today, *jouissance* has become highly possible and prohibition has almost disappeared. As a result, the ever refusing virgin or rejecting woman is increasingly replaced by actively soliciting adolescent girls and hunting women in their forties and fifties. *Me Barbie, you Ken*. A number of men find this very difficult, and their desire for former times of voluptuous but ever unreachable country girls has often enough been replaced by a fear of *vagina dentata*. By itself, this may lead to a renewed aggression against women, and especially against their body.

### *Jouissance and regulation*

With this, we return to the idea of regulation, being the second function of the Other in combination with identity determination. These are the two sides of the same coin because the way in which a group defines its identity has always to do with an ideal image, and hence with prohibitions and prescriptions. A real X (e.g., a real Lacanian analyst) behaves like this and should not behave like that or that. This combination was predicted by Freud, more particularly in his differentiation between the Ideal Ego (you should be like this) and the Super Ego (don't do this), both of them providing the guidelines for the construction of the Ego. He finds the origin of this construction in the smallest group, that is, the oedipal family, but later in his career he generalized these ideas to group psychology as such.

These regulations can be very specific, in function of the specific nature of a particular group, or more general. The rules of a soccer club are different from a choir and school regulations are altogether different. Nevertheless, every single one of them fits a general socio-cultural definition of how a member of a certain group within a certain society has to behave. Beyond all the different regulations, a number of common elements can be found. Nearly always, it is said how a group member has to behave with other group members and with people who don't belong to the group, both in function of a common goal. It speaks for itself that one helps to realise this goal, and often enough, it is prescribed what the individual has to sacrifice in order to help in realizing the aims of the group. As a reward, the member receives a position



within the group and hence protection by it, whilst at the same time sharing the benefits of the goal.

When we look at what are the most elementary groups – the group of boys, girls, men, women, family – and this at a given place and time, then it becomes immediately obvious that these regulations mainly concern the body, both one's own and that of the others. The regulation addresses things like hygiene, eating, drinking, and eroticism. In short: *jouissance*.

A naive reading may consider these to be superfluous restrictions on what are deemed "natural" needs. A reading informed by anthropology will soon discover that such regulations are present in every culture – however different they may be; even more so, that they form the connecting tissue of the social structure. They regulate identity on a number of crucial issues and precisely because of that, they provide safety. The fact that a number of groups or even cultures have installed regulations that cause more trouble than safety is, by itself, not an argument to reject the necessity for a regulation. Living together requires convention, meaning symbolisation; otherwise this living together doesn't work.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, there is probably another reason for this necessity. Half way through his career, Freud had to conclude that mankind does not function solely following the pleasure principle; soon after the behaviourists had to confront the same fact. In Freud's experience, there is something beyond the pleasure principle, something that we strive for while avoiding it at the same time. It amounts to ever higher levels of tension, if need be far beyond the boundaries of the traumatic. Rational thinking in combination with the contemporary scientific discourse will discard these ideas, all the more so because this idea of tension is hardly something that fits medical science. Nevertheless, it suffices to open a journal in order to find more "evidence based" illustrations than you care for... Obviously, something is at work in the subject that brings us to transgressions far beyond the pleasure principle in a region of "*jouissance*", between brackets, because it is not always obvious how enjoyable this *jouissance* is. This is Lacan's conclusion when he studies this *jouissance*: that the subject's ever failing attempt to symbolise it is literally its normal elaboration, that is, following the norms of the Other (Verhaeghe, 2009). And in his reading, the effects on this *jouissance* of the new capitalism and its generalised obligation to enjoy are far from innocent.

In this respect, we can see a strange reversal. With some exaggeration, it can be said that everything that used to be forbidden is nowadays obligatory. In the not so distant past, satisfaction could only be reached after a considerable investment of time and personal efforts, and the general idea was that final satisfaction was not of this world. Today, the contemporary conviction is that our desires should be immediately fulfilled, the only impediment being money in combination with some health care advice. Alas, the postmodern subject also has to experience the impossibility of the *jouissance*. As the conviction remains that it could be reached and as the symbolic castration is denied, the subject is obliged to keep trying, hence installing ever further levels of transgression.

The effect is not what is expected or feared. We do not disappear in limitless debaucheries, as some moral crusaders warn us about. The result is getting lost in a zone of boredom and aggressive frustration with rising levels of nameless insecurity and anxiety. This is all the more strange, because most of us are living in the worlds safest areas. Just like the biologically male or female body did not provide enough certainty in matters of gender identity, safety in reality is not a convincing touchstone for its subjective appraisal.

What follows, is easy to predict: just like the baby who is bothered by his body, the postmodern subject will appeal to the Other. The tragedy is that this Other has lost its status, because it is no longer upheld by the group and its answer no longer carries enough weight. Often enough, this discovery is used to launch a plea for the restoration of the authoritarian father who would bring law and order. In this respect, it is very important to study Lacan's correction on Freud's oedipal theory. In short: the Other of the Other does not exist, meaning that symbolic authority is always arbitrary, based on an illusion and a convention. This does not mean that the paternal function is superfluous, even on the contrary. It guarantees two important issues. I have already argued the first one, namely identity. The second is less obvious, although it is structurally connected to the first one: symbolic authority guarantees the existence of a lack (Lacan, 2006 [1969-70] : 121-129).

This might sound quite philosophical, and of course it is. But at the same time, it has very concrete effects. It means that every authority figure experiences sooner or later that he or she can't live up to his function. This is experienced by every parent, and that is why Lacan considers shame as a fundamental affect for the father. It also means that to learn how to handle the inevitability of the lack should be the most important goal of the combined process of subject formation and drive regulation (usually known as education). For Lacan, the discourse of the capitalist brings a totally different message in this respect: the lack is a pure coincidence, a full answer is possible and there is a big Other that guarantees this answer. Hence his conclusion, that there is connivance between capitalism and modern science, with the publicity business as connection mark.

Viewed from this perspective, it is no wonder that many people experience the lack of a total answer as injustice done to them by a malevolent Other. The aggressive undertone of their appeal shifts soon enough towards an aggressive overtone, with the aggression taking any possible direction, that is to say, either inwards or outwards, towards one's own body or the body of the ever failing others. By way of illustration, I can refer to banal examples from a sector where we would expect the rules to be very clear: the traffic, the real traffic in the streets. Research has demonstrated that road rage has become a common phenomenon in Europe. About one out of three male and one of four female drivers admit that s/he committed traffic aggression during the last year (Smart et al., 2005; Willemsen et al., in press). In most cases, this is limited to cursing, swearing and giving the finger; using one's own car as an obstacle is quite popular as well, but the frequency of what is called "battered assault" increases.<sup>1</sup>

This real traffic may function as a metaphor for that other kind of traffic, called love. To conclude: We are living in a time where both subject formation and drive regulation are not obvious any more. The loss of symbolically defined identities isolates the contemporary subject and obliges it to fall back on elementary exchanges with others, where the body takes a central position. Contrary to what might be assumed, this is not an effect of the disappearance of the big Other, because this Other was never there in the first place. It has to do with the illusion that there is an Other without a lack. The effects of the capitalist discourse on love pass via its rejection of symbolic castration. There is no lack and in case there is one, it is the responsibility of the others, who should be blamed for it.

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<sup>1</sup> An obvious explanation is that this rise in aggression can be explained by the rise in density of the traffic. Although this might be part of an explanation, it is surely not enough: traffic in the Indian cities is three times as dense and hectic as in the western world, and they don't have traffic aggression.

For Lacan, the implication for contemporary love life is easy to predict: « Tout ordre, tout discours qui s'apparente du capitalisme laisse de côté ce que nous appellerons simplement les choses de l'amours, mes bons amis. Vous voyez ça, hein, c'est un rien. » (Lacan, 1971-72, 6 January 1972). « Every order, every discourse that is related to capitalism, leaves aside what we simply call the matters of love, my dear friends. As you can see, this is nothing”.