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Lambert - Redemption: Lacan avec Marx - JCRT 2.1
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The subject of my essay, on “redemption,” concerns something that takes place at the end of a process. Redemption takes place last in the sense of a moment when a series concludes, the moment when it is completed, when the entire series is “converted” by an instance that determines its value, whether here we are talking about the moment of exchange that punctuates the endless circulation of capital, or the moment inserted into the chain of days, the last day, which precedes the “next one” (and not the next day, but rather the next set or series); and of course here I am speaking of the order of days that leads up to and is redeemed by the Sabbath. It is around the relation between these two senses of redemption that I would like to address the convergence of this notion of redemption within two discourses: the discourse of psychoanalysis and religion.

In applying the above passage to the discussion of the Sabbath, what should be highlighted in Marx’s description is the possibility that God has no knowledge of the process involved in the production of cloth, of the order of commodities, that he would designate the same dinner time for all the workers, without regard to the order that determines the time of work itself. “*To enforce the same dinner hour for all the workers*” exposes “the end” of the process itself (i.e., the product) to “damage and incompleteness.” God’s command, therefore, is without regard to the division of labor, not only understood as the division of the activities and classes that belong to the mode of production, but also as the division of the time that is determined by the process of production. God’s Sabbath corresponds to the process of the production of the world. Lunch appears after the workday is finished. But that is God’s time in which a day has been proven to last a thousand of ours. What is important to remark in this “time” is that God has no knowledge of any particular process of production, but categorically declares a certain moment to be Lunch, and categorically demands his order be strictly obeyed according to his own time, which is heterogenous to the time of production. Now, this would be enough to offend any rational or economic order, since it would let the cheese spoil, the meat decay, etc.

3. Specifically, I would like to take up the question of the Sabbath which appears in a very provocative section of Julia Lupton and Kenneth Reinhard’s discussion of Lacan and “Revelation”; however, I would like to shift the domain of this “subject” somewhat in order to address this question from the perspective of the writings of Marx. To justify this shift, I underline the fact that the name of Marx appears in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, to a degree that is unusual for Lacan (with the exception of a later seminar, *L’Envers de la psychanalyse*) and that this in itself should solicit us to listen a little closer concerning the relationship between psychoanalysis and Marxism that Lacan addresses in his seminar, even if it is only for the benefit of certain members of his audience to whom Lacan speaks directly at several points.¹ I would like to take up what most would agree is Marx’s most fundamental concept: the mode of production as determinant of the division of labor. This is such a fundamental concept and has become, I think everyone would agree, the axiomatic principle for any materialist analysis subscribing to the theory of Marx. As Althusser later defined it, any analysis that appeals to

¹It is clear from certain remarks made by Lacan in this seminar that, when he introduced the name of Marx, he is specifically addressing members of his audience who were Althusser’s students, including at that time Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macheray, perhaps in order to seduce them. See Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre VII: L’éthique de la psychanalyse, 1959-60*, established by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1986); trans. by Dennis Porter as *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960* (NY: Norton, 1986). All citations are from the English edition.

the political economy first of Marx must, in some way, be founded on this principle, even if it only takes the form of something that will appear only “in the last instance” ‘ a moment that is suspended according to the promise of the contingent future first raised by Marxist historiography ‘ and must, therefore, correspond to the advent of a “History” that is still, so to speak, waiting in the wings.

4. Many critics have already established that the convergence of the history of Judaism in the West and the history of Marxist thought happens precisely around the role of a world historical actor who is identified with the realization of “the last instance” (that is, with the completion of an historical project that is itself historical, since it exists in the form of “a promise”). This actor has been identified in Marxist and Jewish traditions by an equivalent figure: for the Jewish tradition it is the “Messiah,” while for Marxism it is the messianic role played by “the proletariat.” The fact, arguably, that neither have appeared on the world historical stage points to an intimacy between post-diaspora Jewish thought and what is called “late-Marxism.” It is this intimacy, which has been remarked many times and most forcefully by Walter Benjamin, that can explain the almost ritualistic aspect of the many “returns” to Marx’s original texts and of the endless commentary this has produced, because these returns enact a kind of ritualization of a “promise” that Marx’s writings contain concerning what he calls in *The Grundrisse* “The End of Capitalism” (Sect. H).² My guiding question is whether we might ever understand Marx’s “promise” outside the original order that was introduced into human history by the “sign” of the Sabbath.
5. Turning to the seventh seminar, Lacan defines the Sabbath as the “sign of a gap” or “void” that is installed in the heart of an cyclical or economic order of time (81). As Lacan says, it is an order that is “relative to every law of utility,” which signals, first of all, an alienation from an economical order that gives rise to the discourse of History in the West. The relationship of this moment to the “end” of a certain history that inspired Marx’s thought is clear: first, that what in *The Grundrisse* he called the “End of Capitalism” (i.e., the overturning of the vicious cycle of production that capitalism installs in society) could never have taken place outside the advent of a notion of time that is fundamentally “alienated” from a purely natural or cyclical order of sowing and reaping; and second, what Marx describes as the “history of capitalism,” in fact, refers to the possibility of this arbitrary order suddenly undergoing a radical re-arrangement that is brought about by Capitalism itself whereby the discourse of the Master, suddenly acceding to its own internal limit, casts-off its own mode of production like “a snake shedding its skin.”
6. At this point, we might note a certain parallelism between the principle of “rest” that is inscribed both in the commandment of the Sabbath and in the heart of Capital itself, which Marx defines as a violent and even “fatal” point of contradiction. We might note also an implicit correspondence between the contradiction within these first two principles and yet another form of contradiction that Freud discovers operating at the heart of “the pleasure principle,” which leads “beyond” the latter, that is, to the positing of the “death drive.” It is here, I want to argue, that the fields of psychoanalysis and Marxism make an historical encounter, even though this encounter would later be missed by many who followed in the steps of Marx and Freud. (Here I am thinking of Marcuse in particular.) It is Lacan, I think, who first set his foot upon the exact spot where both systems are founded by a common

²For the reader’s convenience, all citations of Marx are made from the second edition of *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978).

principle, the principle of “homeostasis.” This principle appears in each analytic in the form of a potentially violent contradiction that must be fully accounted for and even, in the case of Marx, theorized as the basis of his “political economy.” Yet, we must ask, is the principle of homeostasis, which can be located in the moment that Marx defines as “the end of Capital” (if not the end, then the absence of work, the time of abjection, when the machinery of production is left idling, even only momentarily, “out-of-use”), the same as the principle that Freud described as the “end of pleasure,” i.e., the restoration of an earlier state of things? Turning to Marx’s description in *The Grundrisse*, this fundamental contradiction cannot be defined outside a series in which it emerges in human time. In other words, this contradiction in the system of capital is deployed as a form of repetition, by which this contradiction itself becomes “historicized,” as Marx writes, in the different crises, explosions, cataclysms that belong to the transformations of Capital itself (291-292). However, in each repetition we find that, according to Marx, the same contradiction must be led back to the point where it receives its primary meaning in an earlier state of things, enabling it in each instance *to go on* with a fresh burst of energy. Here we cannot help but to discern in this description the function that Freud first ascribed to the death drive.

7. Recalling the phrase I had borrowed earlier from Althusser, in each instance we also find the potential of the “last,” the end. In other words, the moment when the entire series comes to its final term and the contradiction that the system of capital is founded upon is fully realized precisely as the contradiction between the time that precedes this moment and the time that follows and is situated beyond it. As Marx writes, “the violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but as a condition of its self-preservation,” is the most striking contradiction that should serve as the principle that it be replaced with “a higher form of social production” (291). Of course, here, Marx is putting on a rationalist argument in the sense of putting on a farce, since we know full well that what he calls “the end of Capitalism” will not come about by “merely thinking through a given collective order in terms of the satisfaction of desires” (Lacan 225).
8. Now let us situate this moment in relationship to the understanding that has been provided by Lacan. What is this place “beyond” but that which, “according to the laws of the pleasure principle, the signifier projects into this beyond equalization, homeostasis, and the tendency to the uniform investment of the ego as such, [a tendency] that provokes its failure” (119)? In this sense, the principle of homeostasis occupies an equivalent place in both analytics; the place of the beyond, which is projected there by the signifier that, in the register of desire and of capital alike, is introduced to put man in relationship “to an object that represents the Thing” (119). Lacan reminds us that this Signifier, like all signifiers, is primarily “fashioned by man, and probably more by his hands than his spirit” (119). Moreover, it is the fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or hole in the real that is fundamentally identical (121). It is for this reason that the signifier representing the principle of homeostasis in each system cannot be situated in a natural realm, which according to Lacan would be identified with a tendency to return to a state of absolute rest, or equilibrium, but rather must be situated in the historical domain (as above, in the series of failures and gaps that historicize this system and make it heterogenous to a function of nature); “since it is articulated at a level that can only be defined as a function of the signifying chain ’ [which] as a reference point of order, can be situated relative to the functioning of nature” (211). It is in this “beyond,” Lacan argues, that the radical meaning of the death drive can be located as the most violent contradiction: “Will to destruction; . . . But also a will to create from zero, a will to begin again.” In other

words, *to go on*. Again, I want to emphasize the importance of the fact that Marx discovered this tendency toward destruction as the fundamental contradiction ' the "end" (the goal, or *but*) of work is both the destruction of the work *and* its momentary interruption, or pause ' that structures all human activity defined as work.

9. I have highlighted the nature of this primary contradiction, which Lacan calls "a scandal," since it will play a major role in my reading of the significance of the Sabbath for two reasons: first, it would seem that the order announced in the Sabbath would appear as something "dumb," in the sense that it gives "no response" to the first order, or that it has no knowledge of the order of economy or nature. This scandal can easily be highlighted by returning to a certain footnote in the first volume of *Das Capital*, where Marx describes the arrangement of breaks in the workday when the process of production is paramount in determining the "time of rest" for the worker (400). For anyone who has worked a day in his or her life, a question naturally emerges: when is lunch time? It seems a very simple question, but one that I hope to prove is at the center of Marx's theory of the division of labor. For Marx, the order of *Capital* is the discourse of the Master (the place of the S1), and the master responds to this question: *lunch is whenever I say it is!* Actually, it is not at all that arbitrary, since this is how the command appears in "the Imaginary" of the worker who mistakes the position of the Boss as the point of the command's emission. On the contrary, for Marx, "lunch" will be determined by the "momentary end" that belongs to the process of production itself (i.e., the finished product).

The main point [at this point in Marx's commentary, concerning the division of labor in Plato] is that the worker must adapt himself to the work, not the work to the worker; . . . If the work, says Plato, has to wait for the worker, the critical point in the process is missed and the product spoiled. The same Platonic idea is found in the protest of the English bleachers against the clause of the Factory Act that provides fixed meal-times for all operatives. Their business cannot wait the convenience of the workers, "for in the various operations of singeing, washing, bleaching, mangling, calendering, and dying, none of them can be stopped at a given moment without risk of damage." To enforce the same dinner hour for all the workers might occasionally subject valuable goods to the risk of danger by incomplete operations (401).

10. Applying the above observation to Lacan's definition of the Sabbath as "a scandal," therefore, we might understand the latter as a cataclysm, or crisis inserted in the economic order, the mode of production. In short, it is an order that violates the order of the Master (S1), and we might speculate that it could have no origin other than the "order of the slave" (or former slave), which inserts within the Master's Discourse a moment of violent contradiction, even non-sense (which I have above referred to as encompassing the ethical dimension of "non-response"), that would henceforth constrain the order of the Master and forbid the totalization of the primary order of economy in determining the meaning of "Man." (Thus, we might understand this in analogy to the notation of ALL [the "Not All"] in the Lacanian scheme.) This unconsciousness of God concerning the particulars of the process of production is very different from the notion of "sacrifice," and as I am here suggesting, departs from Lupton & Reinhard's description of the sacrificial economy of "the sacrifice" (i.e., sublimation). The notion of "the sacrifice" I should recall is a systematic destruction of "goods," one which assumes a knowledge and value of the "goods" in question (which also leads to the selection

of certain “goods” for expenditure, determined as luxuries.) It is not, as it seems to be here, a complete ignorance of the order of the “good,” which is more offensive since it produces waste. Thus, in the function of “sacrifice,” we still have a restricted economic notion, one which tames the contradiction entailed in the destruction of “goods,” in part by raising the significance of this simple contradiction to a level of mystery. Thus, its significance will not touch its literal meaning ‘ the end of “goods” ’ and will not threaten to violently overturn the process of production itself and bring it to an end as well. In other words, the contradiction located at the very heart of production (the moment when the work comes to an end in the product, and where the product comes to an end in its destruction) is, by the function of the sacrifice, transported into another realm and kept at a safe distance from its purely economic or profane determination. This is the fundamental characteristic of the “sacred,” as both a form of protection and alienation (distancing) from the contradictions that belong to profane order. On the other hand, the order of the Sabbath seems to allow for a kind of destruction of “goods” that is not “cancelled out” or “lifted up” (both of which have been given as translations of the Hegelian term *Aufgehoben*). In other words, there is the possibility of a kind of destruction that cannot be rationalized, in short *redeemed*, by any secondary order of signification (and that of Culture, in particular).

11. Following the rabbinic tradition, including the commentary of Abraham Heschel,³ Lupton and Reinhard highlight the radical distinction between the order of time installed by the Sabbath and the order that is signified by the Roman economic notion of the *holiday*, or by the Indo-European economies based upon “the sacrifice,” since the latter still subscribe to an economic determination of discharge, or in psychoanalytic terms, to the pleasure principle. On the contrary, the Sabbath is a “scandal” (Lacan) to economic or rational order precisely because it introduces a counter, or antithetical order, an order of signification that would appear from the perspective of the first as “non-sense.” I would suggest, therefore, that the proper analogy to the interruption of “work” represented by the Sabbath bears less resemblance to the Indo-European institution of sacrifice than to a fundamental historical dimension of divine time that Walter Benjamin discusses, in terms that barely conceal an original relationship to the time of the Sabbath, around the notion of the “general strike” in his essay “The Critique of Violence,” where Benjamin defines the “right to strike” in terms that recall the divine injunction of the Sabbath (in the sense that the order of the strike follows a command that exceeds the power or the threat of violence by the State), that is, to “withdraw” or “estrangle” oneself from the process of capital, which Benjamin describes as a “severing of relations,” a pure means that itself only intervenes or is launched against the violence installed by capital itself. Benjamin writes, “as in view of the state, or law, the right to strike conceded to labor is certainly not a right to violence, but rather, to escape from a violence indirectly exercised by the employer ‘ the moment of violence, however, is necessarily introduced, in the form of extortion, into such an omission, if it takes place in a conscious readiness to resume the suspended under certain circumstances ‘ in other words, the right to strike constitutes from the perspective of labor, which is opposed to the perspective of the state, the right to use violence in attaining certain ends.”⁴
12. As Lupton and Reinhard point out, what is critical to notice here, in relationship to the political economy of Marx, is that if the order of Sabbath (or rest) is not simply addressed to Man, who

³See especially Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1996).

⁴Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 281-281.

merely constitutes a class or even a species belonging to the division of labor, but is intended to cover the entire sphere of production, then something totally radical emerges alongside this order. There is an implication that since the Sabbath extends not only to the activity of man, but also to “his chattel,” that the Sabbath was not addressed to man alone, and was not only intended for the benefit and enjoyment of “Man” (here, I use the exclusive noun intentionally), but also extends to his “property” (i.e., everything defined by the economic notion of “chattels,” including women, offspring, cattle, and even tools and farm implements). Consequently, it seems clear that the Sabbath was not made “for Man,” in a very delimited sense of what constituted this subject as *a portion of the total sphere of production*, as an identity that emerges from and is created by the division of labor. The exact meaning of the word “chattels” is critical in this context, since it is a legal definition of property that stems from Anglo-Saxon origin; therefore, it cannot simply be applied to the interpretation of the Decalogue without mediation and historical qualification of what could be included under the notion of property in the original context. In fact, the English term *chattel*, is derived from the early French *cheptel*, which itself stems from the Latin *capitale* “principal property, goods, income,” in as much as these are defined by their moveability, as “a moveable good.”⁵ That this ability to circulate, which is the intrinsic and necessary property of everything that can be used as “money,” the signifier of *Capital*, takes the form of “livestock” underlines the principle that privileges certain kinds of property, that is, property that can be moved around (and consequently can become lost as well), to become the signifiers used to determine the standard index of all other goods; that it takes the form of “livestock,” or even “cattle,” is owed to the historical accident of belonging to a certain mode of production, i.e., animal husbandry.⁶ (In other parts of Europe, for example, the pecuniary term is aptly derived from *peku*, meaning “sheep.”) Nevertheless, this etymology allows us to revise the term “chattel,” in order to discover the basic concept of *Capital* that it signifies. In other words, God’s command is addressed to Man and his *capital*, whose very “being” is merely the expression of the latter. God commands the silencing of *capital*, the interruption of its movement, including its transformation, its stimulation of exchange, its economy of desire. *On this day, Man should not cede to the desire that is borne in him by Capital.*

13. But something striking occurs at this point ‘ if we return to situate its significance in the context of the thought of Marx. If God commands *Capital* to “rest,” very literally “to stop moving,” then this is nothing less than the destruction of the signifier of *capital* itself, the signifier that establishes the order of signification (values, goods, activities, even beings) that is established and maintained by the movement of capital. I want to be clear in what I am suggesting. The concept of *capital* only designates a certain kind of “property” that becomes a signifier due to its peculiar characteristic of movement; and it is only in movement that *capital* can appear or be said to exist. The selection of the object that represents *capital* (the principal property, or value) for all other objects is completely arbitrary; meaning, it is determined contingently by the series of signifiers into which it is inserted, or from a Marxist understanding, by the mode of production (cattle, sheep, salt, gold, and yes, even shit). In other words, God’s command to capital that it stop moving destroys the signifier of capital itself; however, it destroys the signifier and, at the same time, leaves the object intact. The object remains, it is even left idling, to evoke a word use by Jean-Luc Nancy, it is an object *desoeuvrée*, idling, outside work, even

⁵Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Coral Gables; University of Miami Press, 1969), 51.

⁶Benveniste, 51.

broken or not-working.⁷ The “value” of something that belongs to an order of production ‘ and this includes everything that exists ’ only receives its meaning in terms of the end of work, the moment when it is finished, and this end can only be signified from the perspective of its final end. This is what gives the tool its character of “use,” its “use-value” as well as its finitude, as well as defines certain activities that must be endlessly repeated since, in fact, the end of work is never achieved from the perspective of total production. For God to make a day that follows the completion of work is to make a day in which everything has a strange existence that can no longer be determined by the meaning it receives from the work itself. The object is alienated from its meaning, meaning that it returns as some “alien thing.” It is this “strangeness” (*fremden*) that Lacan returns to remark several times as the fundamental characteristic of “The Thing,” which is “not nothing, but is literally not” (63). This recalls what was said above concerning the appearance of something that has been destroyed even though it remains intact, it appears as something very “strange.” “It is characterized by its absence, its strangeness” (63), a strangeness or “alienation” that will also be found in the domain of the artwork. As an aside, in *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig will also speak of the aesthetic manifestation as being central to the category of redemption, and the artwork being not as something episodic as it is for Hegel. He writes, “for it was the final wisdom of the episode itself not to remain episode,” and despite its naturalistic foundation the artwork that seeks “the actual, visible, the ultimate result, that for whose sake alone all else had to precede, always belonged to the category of redemption.”⁸

14. From another perspective, this stilling or “silencing” of an infinite restlessness of the desires borne in by *capital* cannot be understood apart from the silencing of the drives, from the determination of the body itself as bound up with what Freud called *Not des Lebens*, which Lacan in turn defines as that “pressure, urgency, or state of emergency in life,” in short, with a *Desire* that is not to be determined simply at the level of “needs” (46). But this would imply that, in this moment, the meaning of everything, in this moment of pause and interruption, in this very moment, could no longer receive its meaning or sense from its place or designation in the division of labor (i.e., from the divisions that emerge within the total activity, or mode of production). For example, on this day, the carpenter or shoemaker can no longer be defined by their activity, by their meaning calculated in the sphere of production; the tool or farm implement can no longer be defined by its purpose (which belongs to the time of work). It is precisely this meaning, which functions to define their location and relationship to the total activity of community, that ceases to identify them or their value, and that can be understood as being stricken by an order of negation. But then, this means that the determinant ontology of “Being” (which in a materialist definition must never be separated from the sphere of meaning that is determined by its place in the mode of production) is suspended if not abolished altogether.
15. As Marx argued, objects that are determined by their use-value are essentially determined by their finitude, by their wear, in other words, by being completely exposed to their “use.” They are used up; they have temporary value either as a means to something, or as something that destroys itself in its use. The wood I place in a fire, for example, determines the use-value of the wood, which also means the end of the piece of wood in question. It burns up; it provides

⁷Here, I am referring to the French title of Jean-Luc Nancy’s *La Communauté Désœuvrée* which addresses the meaning of “communism” under this original sense of the human defined outside the sphere of total production, a meaning that appears socially in the forms of excess, destruction, waste, and even radical evil following the work of Bataille and Sade.

⁸Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1970), 248-249.

warmth. It was good; meaning that is how its “good” is determined. I think suddenly we discover the ethical dimension of the Sabbath, in a way that also recalls Kant. Not, however, the Kant of the “categorical imperative,” but rather the Kant of the “hypothetical imperative.” Kant said man (as an end-in-himself) should never be considered simply as a means to some end. Applying this remark to a Marxist language, man should never be determined as wood. He must not be exposed to the sphere of production in such a way that his entire meaning is assigned there. There is this “Other thing” (Lacan) that prohibits this. Therefore, Marx’s entire critique of Capital can be derived from this hysterical complaint and, subsequently, from the prohibition it institutes. *I AM ‘ I am not a piece of wood.* Capitalism, in other words, violates the fundamental meaning that can be according to the Sabbath. It distorts or perverts “this Other thing” of man, the manner in which man receives a meaning apart from the place in the division of labor, in the sphere of production ‘ not only man, but ordinary objects as well. It is here that perhaps, in a longer discussion, we can locate the meaning of the “Beautiful” as in a certain sense “beyond redemption,” which is to say it appears, like the Sabbath was defined earlier, as a determination of the object which appears “relative to every law of utility.”⁹

16. This brings us to the profound intuition that Lacan occasions for us concerning both the meaning of the Sabbath, a meaning that he defined by the word “scandal,” and to the Marxist theory of political economy. How is the object to be determined when it falls outside the order of the Signifier? Two possibilities are given: for the subject, there is the moment of “abject boredom” (what is the experience of abject boredom but the loss of the signifier that determines the subject for another signifier, i.e., the loss of desire, which also gives us a profile of the death drive); and for the object it is the possibility that Lacan names “the beautiful.” On both occasions, according to Lacan, we are in close proximity to *Das Ding*, which Lacan defines early in the *Seminar* as a “pure signifying trauma.”

- Introduction - Julia Reinhard Lupton, University of California Irvine.
- Creation - Richard Halpern, University of California Berkeley.
- Revelation - Kenneth Reinhard, University of California Los Angeles & Julia Reinhard Lupton, University of California at Irvine.

Notes

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⁹It seems natural to turn at this point to the meaning of sublimation, such as Lacan defines it. He defines it in relationship to the concept of “the beautiful” which can be opposed in a certain sense to the domain of “the Good.” The function of the beautiful, for Lacan, can be explained by the existence of a prohibition, which touches on the form of the “sacred.” The “beautiful” is something that stems from a command “Don’t touch!!!” What is the origin of this command? At one level, it can be said to intervene, according to Lacan, into the field determined by the Other’s *jouissance*.

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