

correlation between a symbolic order and the response made by reality [*réel*]. In other words, anger is essentially something related to a formulation that I would willingly borrow from Charles Péguy, who said it in a comical circumstance: it is when the little square pegs don't fit into the little round holes.

(Lacan, 1992, p. 103)³⁷

When it is hypertonic, we stamp our feet, we break things, whether plates or the head of our semblable, we scream, and so on. It is interesting to note that breakage accompanies anger and that it attacks the very discursive agreements that have proven impotent to satisfy us.

A question thus arises: does anger's imprecation aim at the Other or, instead, at something in reality (*du réel*) that prevents things from going the way we want them to? The rage of the small child (the future Rat Man whom Freud told us about) certainly seems to target the Other when he screams at him, "You lamp! You towel! You plate!" – no doubt having no other vocabulary with which to do so – as if the unconscious alerted the child that any signifier can insult the subject and that it is useful to degrade him to the lowly status of a household object. All examples of vituperation against God go in the same direction, like the register of insults which is "the first and last word [of a dialogue], touching on reality [*réel*] only to lose all signification" (Lacan, 1973b, p. 44). We thus rail against the Other who can do nothing about it, and against the others who embody him, since we cannot sway reality (*réel*) itself.

Shame

Shame is a more complicated and more subtle affect than anger. It is also more closely related to the unconscious and more difficult to isolate. There are no affects that are not effects of structure and its limits, of structure's handle or lack thereof on the real. Affects are thus themselves as diverse as the aspects of structure that cause them: the passions for being correspond to the want-to-be engendered by language; the dominance of boredom and moroseness in current discourse echo our lack of enjoyment, echo the jouissance we either have or do not have; sadness inscribes a refusal to know whereas joyful knowledge inscribes knowledge's intrinsic limits;

anger ratifies the non-correspondence between reality (*réel*) and the symbolic. What then does shame correspond to?

Lacan often spoke of shame, but his most substantial and above all newest discussions of this feeling are found at the end of the seminar entitled *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*,³⁸ when he was especially addressing those influenced by the student uprising of May 1968, and one might wonder why. There are good reasons for it. This seminar from 1969–70 questions what regulates social bonds: S_1 (the master signifier) in the master's discourse, and S_2 (knowledge) in university discourse. Shame and its accompanying affects are eminently social affects. Already in 1954, Lacan mentions "this phenomenology of shame, modesty, and prestige, this specific fear engendered by another person's gaze" (Lacan, 1988, p. 215).

The being who is gazed at

Not all affects involve being looked at; for example, neither sadness, nor the pain of existing, nor even anguish involve being looked at. Shame presupposes a surprise unveiling of the subject's being by another's gaze. Its temporality is, in this sense, quite different from that of anguish, which is always related to the *imminence* of the unknown. In shame, it is not imminence that is at work but the contrary: a surprise, unexpected, revealing emergence. What is revealed? An intimate, secret characteristic of being that is most often linked to one's desire and to one's hidden *jouissance*, but also to one's bodily form. We can understand why it is of interest to the psychoanalyst who is the midwife of what the unconscious harbors within itself.

Of all those who commented on shame before him (and they are numerous, including Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Heidegger), Lacan discussed above all the major example proposed by Sartre – that of the voyeur who is suddenly caught by someone and finds himself instantaneously reduced, in a conflagration of shame, to the hidden gaze that he *is*.

The fact is that the object has the precise function of signifying the point where the subject cannot name himself, the point where modesty, I would say, is the royal form of what is turned into shame and disgust in symptoms.

(Lacan, 1958–9, class given on June 3, 1959)

There are plenty of other examples of shame than that of the voyeur, not the least of which is Alcibiades's shame in Plato's *Symposium*, which was commented on by Lacan on March 1, 1961, during his seminar entitled *Transference*:

Alcibiades disgraces himself, and makes of his confession something that is so affectively laden, because the daemon of *Aidós* (Αἰδώς), Shame, intervenes here. This is what is violated here. The most shocking secret is unveiled before everyone: the ultimate mainspring of desire.

(Lacan, 2001a, p. 213–14)

Consider, too, Lacan's earlier remark:

All manner of nuances, [...] running from shame to prestige, and from buffoonery to heroism, appear in the gap of human desire; these nuances indicate that human desire is in some sense entirely exposed, in the most profound sense of the term, to the other's desire.

(Lacan, 1988, p. 221)

In essence, shame is the affect related to the unveiling of the “extimate,”³⁹ the unveiling of that which constitutes me in my being without being me, whether we call it desire, the thing, the object, or the symptom – everything that the other affect known as modesty protects, keeping it safely hidden behind a veil. The lifting of the veil often generates, moreover, a vicarious shame, as if one were ashamed for the other, through imaginary identification with the person who is unveiled. “The only virtue – assuming there is no such thing as a sexual relationship, as I enunciate it – is modesty,” as Lacan says (1973–4, class given on March 12, 1974). It is a virtue with a truly ambiguous sexual function, as ambiguous as the erotic function of a veil that simultaneously hides and reveals, revealing even as it hides, something that is played on so well by the shameless modest woman called “La Pudica” in Barbey d'Aureville's *Les Diaboliques* (1996).

We can understand why Lacan calls for what he terms a “shontology” (*hontologie*, condensing *honte* [shame] and ontology). “It's shameful, as people say, and should produce a shontology, if we finally spell it correctly” (Lacan, 2007, p. 209).⁴⁰ The signifier is unfit

to pin down being, hence what we might call Lacan's anti-ontology. As he said, "Ontology – in other words the consideration of the subject as a being – is shameful [*l'ontologie ... est une honte*], if you will" (Lacan, 2011, p. 116). The subject is a want-to-be and in the signifying order his being is always elsewhere, always displaced. But where there is shame, his being – which is extimate, unavowable, and even misrecognized, and which he cannot get rid of, to which he is riveted – manifests itself in what is unspeakable; it does more than simply stick to him like glue, as they say ... It directly moors he who is displaced by the signifier. This is what is most universal in shame.

Shame at being alive

At the end of *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, in the class given on June 17, 1970, Lacan did not say "our shame" or even "your shame" to the students to whom he was speaking, and nevertheless what was new in his discussion was a function of his diagnosis of the discourse that he calls "the other side." The text is difficult to elucidate. Lacan connects shame both to the master signifier and to death.

What is his contention here?

I will formulate it in a condensed form: a change has occurred in the mooring of shame. I am deliberately borrowing here the expression Lacan himself used for anguish, which said that anguish had shifted from the Other – that of consistent discourse – to an other, whether the object or the real, both of which are foreign (*hétéronomes*) to the Other, both of which ex-sist with respect to the Other. Lacan develops the notion of a specific shame – which he calls "shame at being alive" – that he suggests is characteristic of the state of academic discourse at the time, and that signals "the decline of the master signifier," the master signifier being the one that presides over values and duties, among other things – in other words, over the norms characteristic of a social order.

Lacan raises the question of what "warrants death" on the basis of the common expression, "to die of shame." The latter designates the moments where death seems preferable to the revelation of unavowable being. It is here that the historical factor comes in. We are no longer in an era where failing to fulfill, in one way or another,

the duties prescribed by the master signifier that represents us effectively warrants death, no longer in a lovely era of duels where offenses to our honor are met with the risking of our lives, no longer in an era where a chef like Vatel or someone like Mishima could die for honor's sake. In that era, people truly thought that not living up to the master signifier warranted death and they actually died rather than confining themselves to the affect of "dying of shame." "To die of shame is the only affect related to death that deserves – that deserves what? – that deserves death" (Lacan, 2007, p. 209).⁴¹ People preferred to die in order to, so to speak, redeem their shame and remain inscribed under the master signifier, whatever it might be, subtracting their existence from the chain that it commanded, instating themselves thus in the "being for death" over which language presides. Already, right at the beginning, in "The Function and Field of Speech and Language," Lacan had mentioned the various figures of the bringing into play of death as a manifestation of man's freedom, and among them "the sacrifice of his life that he agrees to for the reasons that give human life its measure" (Lacan, 2006a, p. 320). But, it must be admitted that times have changed and that "it is unusual to die of shame. Yet it is the only sign [...] whose genealogy we can be certain of, namely that it is descended from a signifier" (Lacan, 2007, p. 209).

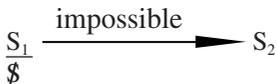
Has the shame of the students Lacan is addressing ceased to descend from the master signifier, ceased to be correlated with its imperative? In my reading, this is what the text says. Shame has turned into a "serious shame at being alive" (p. 211), as Lacan puts it – shame at living a life which, regardless of what happens, never warrants death because it has never been inscribed in the genealogy of an S_1 , a master signifier; a life in which everything is thus reduced to futility. "It isn't worth dying for," as they say. (This new shame, which is correlated with a decline in the master signifier, goes hand-in-hand with another phenomenon of the times: impudence. I will come back to this.) Lacan says that, thanks to an analysis, if you are "a bit serious, you will see that this shame [at being alive] is justified by the fact that you haven't died of shame."⁴² Is he prescribing shame?

Why should the students Lacan is talking about be ashamed? The answer implies a very precise political position linked to the structure

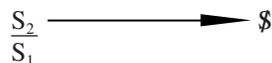
of two of the discourses – the master’s discourse and university discourse – Lacan constructed that year. The master’s discourse places the master signifier in the position of the agent that organizes the discourse, whereas the university discourse places knowledge in the position of the agent. There would be a reason to die of shame for he who “maintains with all his strength a perverted master’s discourse, which is what university discourse is” (Lacan, 2007, p. 212). To the students – whom Lacan calls “astudied [*astudés*]”⁴³ – who are reduced to objects to be trained to compete for medals (like “livestock at a show”) in the form of “course credits”⁴⁴ toward their Master’s degree and who will even write theses, thus collaborating with university discourse, he says: “Being ashamed of not dying of shame from this would perhaps change the tone, such that the real would be involved in it.”⁴⁵

But what is there that is shameful in university discourse compared to the master’s discourse, and what real is at stake? It is the fact that this discourse – by substituting knowledge for the master signifier as what governs the discourse, knowledge as carried by the professor’s voice – dissimulates what serves as the principle of power in the symbolic, which is always an S_1 , on the basis of which a reality of discourse, whatever it may be, becomes oriented and legible.

Master’s discourse



University discourse



The real that is characteristic of the master’s discourse – namely, the structural impossibility that separates S_1 from S_2 qua knowledge – is thus masked and the master signifier changes places and functions.

We see this in the exercise that crowns a student’s coursework: the thesis. One of the primary characteristics of a thesis is that it bears the proper name of its author. It thereby reveals that the presupposition of university discourse is that knowledge has an author. In the knowledge that is turned into a thesis, or into a summa (or slumber [*somme*]), it is the author’s name that holds the place of the master

signifier, and this decline leads to the production of shame that goes hand-in-hand with the production of impudence. Lacan is not the one who invented this impudence: people everywhere decry the cynicism and effrontery of our times, but in fact they are less a subjective disposition than a consequence of a change in discourse and the bankruptcy of the master signifier. What is impudence? Every statement that “is baldly posited” is impudent. All those whose statements are nourished neither by a master signifier (the master was not impudent) nor by an assured knowledge are thus impudent. This runs the gamut from gurus of all ilk to experts of all kinds. Is there a limit to impudence? Transference, which presupposes not a master signifier but knowledge and its supposed subject, is perhaps such a limit; this raises a question regarding the possible impudence of the subject for whom this belief has died away – namely, the analyst.

It should not be thought that Lacan’s contention here is reactionary. By constructing the structure of the discourses at the time of the 1968 antiauthoritarian revolt in France, Lacan was not coming to the rescue of the masters, whoever they were. Moreover, the antiauthoritarian revolt of 1968 – and a revolt is not a subversion – by yelling, “down with the masters,” overlooked the other tyranny, which is that of knowledge itself. For one can ask a master to justify himself, whereas knowledge cannot be questioned in the same way; it spares itself the trouble of justifying itself and imposes itself as if it were part and parcel of reality (*réel*) – especially when it comes from the true knowledge of science, so-called hard science. This tyranny is redoubled, moreover, in our times by the pseudo-scientific ideology of everything that legitimates itself by appealing to science in order to establish its authority in the competition of products and practices. Hence the unprecedented rise of the reign of experts as new figures of the subject-supposed-to-know, and the ever-useful invocation of supposed scientificity in every domain, from social and economic management to therapeutic practices.

Lacan did not intend to restore the master’s powers by emphasizing the function of the master signifier. Quite the contrary. He highlighted, instead, the fact that the master’s power never operates on the basis of brute force alone but on the basis of the Word, for discourse is organized by a master signifier that must not be confused

with the master incarnate: the latter is not a master, but is instead sustained by the master signifier. This is so true that, today, masters who wield no power – our politicians – when they no longer know which way is up, appeal to the authority of legal texts as though they were pseudo-master-texts and proceed to legislate right and left.

The fact is that capitalist discourse has no equal when it comes to degrading the master signifier: capitalist discourse is endowed with a power of destruction that no insurrection against the master could ever even approach. If people didn't realize that in 1970, it seems that today it is palpable in the continually developing crisis of capitalism that progresses ... without masters, to the great displeasure of those who would like to become masters. Hence the proliferation of experts in pseudo-legibility whose cacophony merely helps further the decline in question.

Lacan's contention regarding university discourse, made in the context of the 1970s, obviously has an import that goes well beyond them, and we must wonder whether, with each change of places, there is not some further decline in the master signifier that occurs, particularly in psychoanalysis. His contention applies, in any case, to the more general context of capitalist discourse. Lacan gave an indication in this direction, saying that students are not wrong to consider themselves brothers not of the proletariat, but of the underclass, because the proletariat is like the Roman plebeians had been – they were very distinguished people, at the same level and on the same side as the master – whereas the underclass included everyone else.

I spoke earlier of the anguish of the generalized proletarian; I could similarly say that there is a shame at being alive found in all subjects who have fallen away from the major social bond and also, of course, those who managed to escape from the concentration camps, survivors of the collapse of a whole world in World War II. Many attest to this – Robert Antelme, Primo Levi, Imre Kertész, and others too. Lacan added a chapter to this in his commentaries on the discourse of capitalism, which is a discourse that produces the shame of being alive owing to the decline of the master signifier.

Nevertheless, Lacan seems to discreetly, and in a muted way, prescribe to the students to whom he speaks another shame than the mere shame at being alive, a shame at their behavior in participating in the decline of the master signifier which could possibly change

something – have “another import,” as he puts it. It might possibly be a good shame, in a sense, which would lead to action designed to rectify shameful impudence, the shame Lacan himself might inspire in them when he manages to make them “feel ashamed” by his example. The value of shame has been perceived by others, Kertész, for example, who in referring to Jaspers, said: “No matter what I do I am always ashamed; and that is what is best in me” (Kertész, 2010, p. 118). We see here the ethical component of shame which is present in all of Lacan’s considerations regarding affect.

Let me emphasize the specificity of Lacan’s viewpoint regarding the main affects that occur throughout history. It is particularly legible regarding shame, which has already been so often commented on, by Heidegger before Lacan and by Agamben after him, including Sartre and Levinas along the way. The dividing line among them concerns the ontological dimension. Lacan borrowed Sartre’s description of the moment at which another’s gaze brings out what is most real in my being, whether it is called desire or *jouissance*; Levinas saw in this moment the intolerability of the “fact of being riveted to oneself” (Levinas, 1982), riveted to a misrecognized and even rejected self, a self from which one cannot escape.

But by substituting “shontology” for ontology, Lacan did not adopt Levinas’s position. Quite the contrary. Shontology does not mean that shame is what is most characteristic about being, that shame signals the encounter between speaking beings and being itself and even that it is essentially shame at being, as Heidegger maintains. Lacan’s renamed shontology does not open up onto a mystical or metaphysical horizon of being. It opens onto what is not at the horizon but what is clearly found in experience, which is what motivates psychoanalysis and which psychoanalysis deals with – namely, what each speaking being is in fact “riveted” to: his desire-based fantasy and the opaque *jouissance* of his symptom. This is, moreover, why shame is never purely intrasubjective, the other always being involved – not necessarily in order to make you feel ashamed, as when someone says to a child: “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” The other is involved as a presence, whether real or imagined, and this conditions shame.

Shame, far from being a metaphysical universal, is thus a social affect, which has its own historical forms tied to the discourse

in which it is produced. If its precondition is capitalism with its degrading of the master signifier, the shame of the 1968 students, and above all of those who escaped from the concentration camps, it is certainly not homologous to antiquity's *Aidós*.⁴⁶ We must no doubt follow Kertész's reading, as he is one of those who manifestly touched the least on the shame of those who managed to escape, recognizing in the Holocaust an absolute beginning – something that is conceivable only in terms of discourse, let us say, in terms of culture.

Notes

- 1 See Lacan (1974, 1990).
- 2 *Le gai savoir* is the French title of Nietzsche's book (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*) known in English as either *The Joyful Wisdom* or *The Gay Science*. *Sçavoir* is an older French spelling of *savoir*.
- 3 See Lacan (1974, p. 39; 1990, p. 22). The fuller passage reads as follows: "People qualify sadness as depression by basing it on the soul [...]. But it is not an emotion [*état d'âme*: literally, state of the soul], it is simply a moral failing [*faute*: crime, fault, misconduct, offense, wrongdoing], as Dante, and even Spinoza, put it: a sin, which implies moral cowardice, which in the final analysis can only be situated on the basis of thought – that is, on the basis of the duty to put it well or to find one's way about in the unconscious, in structure."
- 4 *Acedia* (or *accidie*) may be defined as a state of restlessness and inability either to work or to pray.
- 5 See Lacan (1974, p. 40; 1990, p. 22).
- 6 See Lacan (1998a, p. 9).
- 7 Freud's term is *Wissentrieb*; see, for example, Freud (1953, p. 194), where it is translated as "instinct for knowledge," and Freud (1955a, p. 245), where it is translated as "epistemophilic instinct."
- 8 See Freud (1959b) and Lacan (1979).
- 9 See Lacan (1974, p. 67; 1990, p. 43).
- 10 Happiness in French is *bonheur*; Lacan decomposes *bonheur* into *bon* (good or lucky) and *heur* (the older meaning of which is "occurrence," whether good or bad; today it primarily means "good fortune," "luck," or "chance").
- 11 On *ex-sistence*, see especially Lacan (1998a, pp. 22, 43, 121, and 129). The term "ex-sistence" was first introduced into French in translations of Heidegger's work (e.g., *Being and Time*), as a translation for the Greek *εκστασις* and the German *Ekstase*. The root meaning of the term in Greek is standing outside of or standing apart from something. In Greek, it was generally used for the "removal" or "displacement" of something, but it also came to be applied to states of mind which we would now call "ecstatic." (Thus a derivative meaning of the word is "ecstasy.") Heidegger often played on the root meaning of the word, "standing outside" or "stepping outside oneself," but also on its close connection in Greek with the root of the word for "existence." Lacan uses it to talk about "an existence which stands apart from," which insists as it were from the outside; something not included on the inside, something which, rather than being intimate, is "extimate."

- 12 *Faute* means both sin (or wrongdoing) and lack or absence (above all in the expression *faute de quelque chose*).
- 13 See Lacan (1998a, p. 55).
- 14 Lacan introduces the adjective *unien* in ... *ou pire* (Lacan, 2011, p. 126), where he connects it with his famous claim: *Yad'lun* (which might be rendered as “there’s such a thing as One”). The adjective might be rendered as one-ian (as when we say that someone is a Freud-ian), as unitary or unitarian, or perhaps even as characteristic of what is (or those who are) united. (In recent years, people or things from the United States, as opposed to from North America in general, are sometimes called *Etats-Uniens* by the French.) Note that, in *Television*, Lacan (1974, p. 41; 1990, p. 23) says that he uses the word to “designate the identifying of the Other with the One,” in other words, the collapsing of the Other into the One (reducing the Other sex, for example, to the same – that is, reducing Woman to the status of men as characterized by the phallic One).
- 15 See Lacan (1974, p. 40; 1990, p. 23).
- 16 The French here refers to a surrealist story about a couple who agree to meet at a costume ball at the opera; they dance all night and in the morning take off their masks and see each other’s faces. With horror they realize they weren’t dancing with the partners they had thought they were with.
- 17 That is, that keeps the divided subject divided.
- 18 See Lacan (1974, p. 40; 1990, p. 23).
- 19 Regarding this and the next sentences, see Lacan (1974, p. 41; 1990, p. 23).
- 20 The French here is a common way of referring to Aristophanes’ spherical creature, which is made up of two beings joined together; *faire la bête à deux dos* is also a colloquial way of saying “to take a roll in the hay” or “to have sex.”
- 21 As Lacan (1998a, p. 71) says in *Encore*: “And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as based on feminine jouissance?”
- 22 See Lacan (1974, p. 41; 1990, p. 23).
- 23 See Lacan (1974, p. 41; 1990, pp. 23–4).
- 24 See Lacan (1974, p. 41; 1990, p. 24).
- 25 See Lacan (1974, p. 41; 1990, p. 24).
- 26 See Lacan (1974, p. 41; 1990, p. 24).
- 27 See Lacan (2006a, p. 521).
- 28 For Lacan’s earlier comments on the three passions, see, for example, “Direction of the Treatment” (Lacan, 2006a, p. 627).
- 29 See Lacan (1988, p. 271).
- 30 See Lacan (2006a, p. 618).
- 31 See Lacan (2006a, p. 853).
- 32 See Lacan (1998a, p. 77).
- 33 See Lacan (1998a, p. 83).
- 34 Regarding “learned ignorance,” see, for example, Lacan (2006a, p. 362). Regarding “learned ignorance” versus “crass ignorance,” consider especially the following passage: “Lastly, however little one forces oneself to keep up with a literature [analytic literature] which is, it must be admitted, hardly enticing, one sees the role played in it by ignorance, by which I do not mean to designate learned ignorance or trained ignorance, but rather crass ignorance: the kind of ignorance whose surface has never even been scratched by the plow of a critique of its sources” (p. 489).
- 35 See Lacan (1998a, p. 96).
- 36 See Lacan (1998a, p. 110).
- 37 Here as elsewhere, Soler does not follow the text of the published French edition of Seminar VII.

- 38 See Lacan (2007).
- 39 On the “extimate” and “extimacy,” see, for example, Lacan (1992, pp. 122 and 167; 1992, pp. 101 and 139).
- 40 In French the *h* in *hontologie* is silent, making the sound of the two words, *ontologie* and *hontologie*, indistinguishable.
- 41 Lacan seems to be suggesting that one deserves to die if one merely “dies of shame” instead of actually dying.
- 42 See Lacan (2007, pp. 211–12).
- 43 See Russell Grigg’s commentary on the term in Lacan (2007, p. 9); Lacan works object *a* into “student” or “studied,” forming “astudied” (pp. 117, 121).
- 44 *Unités de valeur* (course credits) literally means units of value.
- 45 See Lacan (2007, pp. 212).
- 46 On *Aidós*, see “Signification of the Phallus” (Lacan, 2006a, p. 692) and the *Transference* seminar (Lacan, 2001a, pp. 213–14).