

[US Blues—Bury the Hatchet : 22nd November 2018 : Thomas Svolos](#)

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Towards XVIIth New Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis' congress on '!'Urgent!' : 1st & 2nd June 2019 : in Tel Aviv. See [New Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis http://www.amp-nls.org/page/gb/170/the-congress](#) 2019 congress, on 1st & 2nd June 2019

US Blues—Bury the Hatchet

By Thomas Svolos 22nd November 2018

Asked about her commitment to running for and again leading the United States House of Representatives as Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi replied “It’s an urgency I can’t resist.”[1]

This use of the relatively uncommon (at least, in the United States) word *urgency* of course evokes the upcoming Congress of the New Lacanian School that has that precise title.

This matter of urgency speaks to the increased place of hate and fear in American politics over the past two years, generally ascribed to the politics of Donald Trump (though of course the presence of similar discourse in Europe and elsewhere speak to the fact that this is a global phenomenon—we are more globally connected than ever, in the flows of capital and labor and even ideology as well, in spite of efforts to stem that flow). But, of course, that said, the hatred is no less evident on the side of many on the left, who hate Trump and Republicans with no less passion. Those who grieve the loss of civil discourse in American politics—which indeed was somewhat characteristic at times of Washington, DC, during the period of post-War stability through, say, the late 1960’s or the 1980’s, depending on where one makes the historical break point—are quick to forget the conflict and hatred and fear that characterized part of the 1950’s and the activities of Joe McCarthy and which indeed has been an intermittent feature of American politics for a long time, as documented most forcefully by Richard Hofstadter, apropos the Goldwater campaign, in his 1964 essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.”[2] Indeed, our Congress was quite wild exactly a century before the 1950’s in the 1850’s with Representatives showing up in chambers armed with guns and knives, all part of the tensions and conflict associated with slavery.[3]

As Claudia Iddan referenced in her very sharp text on the judiciary and Israel,[4] the formation of a group—in her case, talking about a nation, but this could apply as well

to a political party—is noted by Jacques Lacan in *Seminar 17ⁱ* to be a function of segregation, an act of segregation based upon hatred of the other, those outside of the group (see too here the remarkable conclusion of Lacan’s early text on “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty”ⁱⁱ for an earlier formulation of this concept, one that I found helpful in an analysis of the 2016 US presidential election[5]).

One conclusion that we might draw from Lacan’s work on groups is, of course, that groups are inherently Imaginary constructs and thus, as such, are logically based on some form of *meconnaissance*, of mis-recognition. I suspect that for some of the left and left political groups, it is a matter of valence: the idealism and hope of various left or progressive agendas hiding some hatred or negative emotion. We see this most succinctly in a fictional episode of *The West Wing*: the conservative character Ainsley Hayes working in the otherwise progressive White House puts it best, in an exchange with her liberal co-worker Sam Seaborn in a conversation about gun control:

Sam Seaborn: “It’s not about personal freedom, and it certainly has nothing to do with public safety. It’s just that some people like guns.”

Ainsely Hayes: “Yes, they do. But you know what’s more insidious than that? Your gun control position doesn’t have anything to do with public safety, and it’s certainly not about personal freedom. It’s about you don’t like people who *do* like guns. You don’t like the people. Think about that, the next time you make a joke about the South.”[6]

Another rather striking example of this position on the left is the response of some progressives to the act taken in 1965 by Bob Dylan. At the time, Dylan was at the top of the progressive, folk music scene in the United States (and, indeed, many folk musicians were quite progressive in their politics and their political advocacy: e.g., Pete Seeger was a member of the Communist Party). As a very young man in the early 1960’s, Dylan erupted on the scene and was seen as the one to carry the torch of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger to a new generation. Well, Bob Dylan did not want that *semblant*, he wanted to do what he wanted to do musically and was not interested in this identification. So, wanting to move in a different direction, he “went electric” in 1965, adding the blues guitar player Mike Bloomfield and a few others as a backup band. The global reaction on the part of the left folk scene was striking—hatred, vitriol, accusations that Dylan was Judas—and not just in the United States, but also in his English tours of that period (as documented so well in Martin Scorsese’s documentary, *No Direction Home*).

So, what then in politics? In her article, Iddan describes one approach that is not founded on hatred, apropos the judiciary, namely that one must protect human rights for everyone, regardless of affiliation or identification. This universalism is perhaps one path by which one might transcend groups and the imaginary identifications that come with it. (One might even read this universalism in Lacan’s work itself, in *Televisionⁱⁱⁱ*, in his musings on the role of the saint, where he states “The more saints, the more laughter; that’s my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse—which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some.”[7])

I propose that another path would be to subvert the *semblants* of the group, subversion being, according to Jacques-Alain Miller (in his 2005 radio interviews on France Culture, “Histoires de Psychanalyse”[8]), a properly Lacanian approach to politics. I believe one small example of this is Return Day, celebrated in Georgetown, Delaware.[9] For the past two centuries, on this day, a few days after the election, candidates of both parties drive through town in horse-drawn carriages, then the election results are announced, and then they literally “bury the hatchet,” an act I see

as inherently subversive of the party identifications, without necessarily dissolving them.

- [1] <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/08/politics/nancy-pelosi-house-speaker-cnntv/index.html>
- [2] Published in a book of the same name, but available in the original *Harper's* essay at <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>)
- [3] See the work of Joanne Freeman, summarized in her recent *New York Times* opinion piece: "The Violence at the Heart of Our Politics," September 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/07/opinion/sunday/violence-politics-congress.html>
- [4] "Are There Judges?" *Lacanian Review Online* 103, November 11, 2018, <http://www.thelacanianreviews.com/are-there-judges/>
- [5] "You're Not in the 1%, So Why Vote Like You Are?" *Lacanian Review Online* 57, December 4, 2016, <http://www.thelacanianreviews.com/youre-not-in-the-1-so-why-vote-like-you-are/>
- [6] <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0745637/quotes>
- [7] Jacques Lacan, *Television*, Norton, 1990, p. 16.
- [8] Audio files of the lectures may be found at <http://www.lacan.com/millerlecture.htm>
- [9] See Randall Chase, "Delaware politicians bury a hatchet in post-election ritual," *Washington Post*, November 8, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/delaware-politicians-bury-a-hatchet-in-post-election-ritual/2018/11/08/34251ee0-e3c5-11e8-ba30-a7ded04d8fac_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.30be3fd50942

By [Thomas Svolos](#) | November 22nd, 2018 | [LRO 106](#)

ⁱ The formation of a group is noted by Jacques Lacan in *Seminar 17* to be a function of segregation, an act of segregation based upon hatred of the other, those outside of the group
Seminar XVII : 11th March 1970 : pVIII 16 to 17 of Cormac Gallagher's translation
: See [Seminar XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The reverse side of psychoanalysis: 1969-1970 : from 26th November 1969: Jacques Lacan](#) or here <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=241>
The energy that we have from all being brothers very clearly proves that we are not so. Even with your blood brother nothing proves that we are his brother – we can have a completely opposite batch of chromosomes. This passion for fraternity, not to mind the rest, liberty and equality, is something that is outrageous and we would do well to see what it is covering over. I know of only a single origin for fraternity – I mean human, always *humus* – it is segregation. We live of course in a period where segregation, ugh! There is no longer any segregation anywhere. It is unheard of when you read the newspapers. Only in society – I do not want to call it *human* because I use terms sparingly, I am careful about what I say, I am not a man of the left – I note everything that exists, and in the first place fraternity, is founded on segregation. No fraternity is even conceivable, has the slightest foundation, as I have said, the slightest scientific foundation, except through the fact that people are isolated together, isolated from the rest by something. It is a matter of knowing how it works, and of why it is that way. But in any case, that it is like that leaps to the eye, and acting as if it were not true must necessarily have some drawbacks. What I am telling you here is a kind of half-saying. If I am not telling you why it is like this, it is first of all because, if I say this is how it is, I am unable to say why it is like this. Here

is an example. In any case, they discover that they are brothers, one wonders in the name of what segregation. This means that, as regards the myth, this is a little weak. And then, they all decide, with one heart, that no one will touch the little mummies [p115 of Russell Grigg's translation gives mummies]. Because, besides, there is more than one of them. They were interchangeable, since the old father had them all. They could sleep with the brother's mother, precisely, since they are brothers only through their father.

No one ever seems to have been amazed by the curious fact of the extent to which 'Totem and Taboo' has nothing to do with the usual use of the Sophoclean reference.

ii - '(see too here the remarkable conclusion of Lacan's early text on "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty" for an earlier formulation of this concept), ...'

p18-19 of Bruce Fink & Marc Silver's translation : See [Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism : March 1945 : Jacques](#)

[Lacan](#) or [herehttp://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=5664](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=5664) : Here, however, we would like to indicate their contribution to the logical notion of collectivity.

Tres faciunt collegium, as the adage goes, and the *collectivity* is already integrally represented in the sophism, since the collectivity is defined as a group formed by the reciprocal relations of a definite number of individuals – unlike the *generality* defined as a class abstractly including an indefinite number of individuals.

But it suffices to extend the sophism's proof by recurrence to see that it can be logically applied to an unlimited number of subjects,[Lacan's 1966 footnote 4] it being posited that the attribute "negative" can only come into play in the case of a number equal to the number of subjects minus one. Lacan's 1966 footnote 5] But temporal objectivation is more difficult to conceptualize as the collectivity grows, seeming to pose an obstacle to a *collective logic* with which one could complete classical logic.

We will nevertheless show what such a logic would have to furnish, faced with the inadequacy one senses in an assertion such as "I am a man," couched in whatever form of classical logic and derived as the conclusion from whatever premises one likes (e.g. "man is a rational animal", etc.).

This assertion assuredly appears closer to its true value when presented as the conclusion of the form here demonstrated of anticipating subjective assertion :

- 1) A man knows what is not a man;
- 2) Men recognize themselves amongst themselves to be men;
- 3) I declare myself to be a man for fear of being convinced by men that I am not a man.

This constitutes a movement which provides the logical form of all "human" assimilation, precisely insofar as it posits itself as assimilative of a barbarism, but which nonetheless reserves the essential determination of the "I". . . [Lacan's 1966 footnote 6]

Lacan's Footnotes (1966) p19-20 of Bruce Fink's & Marc Silver's translation :

- 4) Here is the example for four subjects, four white discs and three black ones :

A thinks that, if he were a black, any one of the others – B, C or D – could surmise concerning the two others that, if he himself were black, they would waste no time realizing they are whites. Thus one of the others – B, C or D – would quickly have to conclude that he himself is white, which does not happen. When A realizes that, if they – B, C and D – see that he is a black, they have the advantage over him of not having to make a supposition about it, he hurries to conclude that he is white.

But don't they all leave at the same time as he? A, in doubt, stops; and the others too. But if they all stop, what does this mean? Either they stop because they fall prey to the same doubt as A, and A can thus race off again without worry. Or it's that A is a black, and that one of the others (B, C or D) has been led to wonder whether the departure of the other two does not in fact signify that he is a black, and to realize that their stopping does not necessarily imply he is white – since either can still wonder for an instant whether he's not black. Which would allow him <B, C or D> to posit that they should both start up again before him if he is a black, and to start up again himself from this waiting in vain, assured of being what he is, i.e. white. Why don't B, C and D do it? Well if they don't, then I will, says A. So they all start up again.

Second stop. Assuming I am black, A says to himself, it must now dawn upon one of the others – B, C or D – that, if he were a black, he could not impute to the two others this further hesitation; therefore he is white. B, C and D should thus start up again before him [A]. Failing which, A starts up again, and all the others with him.

Third stop. But all of them should know by now that they are whites if I am truly black., A says to himself. If they stop, then. . . .

And the certainty is verified in three *suspensive scansions*.

5) Concerning the condition of this minus one in the attribute, cf, the psychoanalytic function of the One-extra [l'Un-en-plus] in the subject of psychoanalysis, p480 in *Écrits*, Seuil, 1966. [The reference here is to Lacan's "Situation of Psychoanalysis and Training of the Psychoanalyst in 1956", now in English translation by Bruce Fink]

From [Écrits : 1966 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1206](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1206)

P401 of Bruce Fink's translation : The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of the Psychoanalyst : 1956 : Jacques Lacan – see below **]

6) The reader who continues on in this collection [the French 1966 edition of the *Écrits*] is advised to return to this reference to the collective, constituting the end of the present article, in order to situate what Freud produces in the field of collective psychology [Massenpsychologie und Ichanalyse, 1920 (Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego)] : The collective is nothing but the subject of the individual.)

See [Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism : March 1945 :](#)

[Jacques Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=5664](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=5664)

**p400 of Bruce Fink's translation of Situation of Psychoanalysis and Training of the Psychoanalyst in 1956 : 1956 : Jacques Lacan : See [Écrits : 1966 : Jacques](#)

[Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1206](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1206) : In a quest for knowledge, a certain refusal on the scale of being, beyond the object, is the feeling that most solidly ties the troop together: this feeling is knowledge in a pathetic form; people commune in it without communicating, and it is called hatred.

P401 of Bruce Fink's translation : Here we see the function of the "One Extra" [un en Plus], but we also see that it must be "Just a One" [Un Sans Plus], for every "One More" [Un Encore] would be "One Too Many" [Un De Trop], making all the number twos fall back into a presumption that remains without remission, it being known to be irremediable.**

iii - ... this universalism in Lacan's work itself, in *Television*, in his musings on the role of the saint, where he states "The more saints, the more laughter; that's my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse—which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some." See [Television Television: 31st January 1974 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=326](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=326) : p16 of Translated by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson's translation : p19-20 of October v 40 :

So let's turn to the psychoanalyst and not beat about the bush. Though what I am going to say is to be found under that bush as well.

Because there is no better way of placing him objectively than in relation to what was in the past called : being a saint.

During his life a saint doesn't command the respect that a halo gets for him.

No one notices him as he follows Balthasar Gracian's Way of Life – that of renouncing personal brilliance – something that explains why Amelot de la Houssaye thought he was writing about the courtier.

A saint's business, to put it clearly, is not *caritas*. Rather, he acts as trash [*déchet*] ; his business being *trashitas* [*il décharite*]. So as to embody what the structure entails, namely allowing the subject, the subject of the unconscious, to take him as the cause of the subject's own desire.

In fact it is through the abjection of this cause that the subject in question has a chance to be aware of his position, at least within the structure. For the saint, this is not amusing, but I imagine that for a few ears glued to this TV it converges with many of the oddities of the acts of saints.

That it produces an effect of *jouissance* - who doesn't "get" the meaning [*sens*] along with the pleasure [*joui*]? The saint alone stays mum; fat chance of getting anything out of him. That is really the most amazing thing in the whole business. Amazing for those who approach it without illusions: the saint is the refuse of *jouissance*.

Sometimes, however, he takes a break, which he's no more content with than anyone else. He comes [*jouit*]. He's no longer working at that point. It's not as if the smart alecks aren't lying in wait hoping to profit from it so as to pump themselves up again. But the saint doesn't give a damn about that, any more than he does about those who consider it to be his just deserts. Which is too sidesplitting.

Because not giving a damn for distributive justice either is where he most often started from.

The saint doesn't really see himself as righteous, which doesn't mean that he has no ethics. The only problem for others is that you can't see where it leads him.

I beat my brain against the hope that some like these will reappear. No doubt because I, myself, didn't manage to make it.

The more saints, the more laughter; that's my principle, to wit , the way out of capitalist discourse—which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some.

