

# Trump, Our Favourite *Jouissance*

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*One only has to offer no resistance, to be its [the Other's] dupe.<sup>1</sup>*

*In the meantime, the world faces two deadly diseases:  
a pandemic and a pathetically incompetent president.<sup>2</sup>*

Can we call President Trump stupid? On this question it seems the jury is still out. Or perhaps we simply enjoy calling him stupid, regardless of whether he is or not. Although obviously lacking finesse and sophistication, Trump purports a strange transparency and directness in which, ironically, the modern liberal plea remains at play. On the other hand, Trump's ultra-conservative ideological positions on, for example, economic strategy, climate change, gun ownership, white supremacy, women's rights, and most recently, the covid-19 pandemic, are privileged by him with open and unapologetic pride in the face of both contradictory scientific evidence and increasing grassroots opposition in some political circles.

However, his strange, apparently stupid transparency is at the same time distinctly alarming when accompanied by the preposterous Trumpian rhetoric and conviction which we are now so used to hearing that it is dangerously close to being normalised political utterance. For example,

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best [...]. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with [to] us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.<sup>3</sup>

The following astonishing threat redolent of adolescent dysfunction is from an article from 2016 on the *GQ* website, 'Stupid Shit Donald Trump Said Today',

I will build a great wall – and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me – and I'll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.<sup>4</sup>

Then there is, of course, his charmless infamously, misogynistic, "Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything."<sup>5</sup> Yet in spite of all this, Trump as American President retains such economic and political power that his influence extends beyond the borders of the USA to countries who are forced to deal with his government, and internally to the many public servants and politicians who daily rub shoulders with him whether they like it or not. But what might the example of Trump be telling us about ourselves, even through our readiness to openly and repeatedly express what a failure he is?<sup>6</sup> How is it that although Trump so readily presents as a stupid person in power and, moreover, one who we should by now know demands total uncritical support and is dismissive of anyone not serving his ideological agendas, those of us who are not Trump supporters still feel duped by him? It is because of the *jouissance* a figure such as Trump is able, one way or another, to engender in us? Not long ago in his own reality television show, *The Apprentice*, he proudly posited himself as the unequivocal Master, issuing orders (and contrived stupid games) to his willing vassals, thereby exposing the parallel between Feudalism and today's business world driven in the name of capitalist accumulation. Those who disobeyed Trump or were not up to the task were simply dismissed, whereas the winning vassal enjoyed the Master through becoming legitimately employed in an executive position. Because high ratings enabled this show to run for 15 seasons, one cannot dispute the ready-made *jouissance* Trump created before becoming President.

Clearly, we are all complicit in enjoyment of the spectacle of Trump. He is a perfect example of what Lacan calls “the jouissance of the vanquished idiot”, one who is fondly engaging with his own Phallus. As Lacan elaborates, “[t]he vanquished idiot believes he is master. I am master of myself as I am of the universe.”<sup>8</sup> We are here reminded of Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities* where the term ‘masters of the universe’ describes the attitude of Wall Street traders. Such a masturbatory presence and presumption of knowledge provides an obvious path for our outrage - how dare he enjoy himself when the world is in such shambles? Yet at the same time through him as a mediatory, he enables public expression of problematic political and economic concerns, for example, through his early outrageous and cavalier dismissal of the covid-19 threat:

America will again and soon be open for business. We are not going to let it [covid-19] turn into a long-lasting financial problem.<sup>9</sup>

His ensuing, somewhat patronising offer of comfort to the public is framed within a totally unrealistic apprehension of his power to deliver:

For those worried and afraid, please know that as long as I am your President you can feel confident that you have a leader who will always fight for you and I will not stop until we win.<sup>10</sup>

Win what exactly? The push towards productivity points to Trump as capitalism’s ultimate hand-maiden. Covid-19 has so hystericalized capitalism that Trump comes to its rescue by initially resisting lock-down and thereby somehow ‘protecting’ US citizens. What he does not admit is that getting back to work as quickly and quietly as possible in the name of capitalist service will sacrifice many of those who are the most vulnerable to covid-19, the older generation and the poor. Even more outrageously, Trump privileges his gut feeling and intuition over scientific advice in encouraging those who are infected with covid-19 to consume the (unproven) drug, hydroxychloroquine. Why would he do this? Is it because for him as a shareholder in the pharmaceutical company producing the drug it further provides the political platform for a possible power grab during a time of crisis, all of which he would indeed be stupid to refuse! Here again we feel outraged by his sheer lack of concern as he keeps his eye on both the almighty dollar and personal power. Yet at

the same time we are simply not in the least surprised, indeed we have come to expect such behaviour. That we can indeed foresee Trump's reactions is the most intriguing point about being duped: we know very well that Trump dupes us and we anticipate it without being overly concerned but nevertheless ready to be outraged as we are confronted with our desire for discourse.

We might like to think that we did not choose Trump, that he simply emerged from the business world, got on the political bandwagon and somehow now we are stuck with him as President. But we know that this is not the complete picture. Trump came to the Presidency because the conditions for such as he to take up this role were perfectly in place. The electorate was not happy for the Clinton oligarchy to be in charge again, having had enough of Bill's philandering and mistrustful of Hilary, possibly because she forgave Bill (on political grounds) for his indiscretions. But more probably because she manifested as cunning and smarter than both Bill and Trump, also a bit too close to Wall Street and big business. Being the lesser of two evils Trump triumphed, perhaps in part because the electorate already sensed enjoyment of Trump more than that of Hilary. After all Trump, unlike Hilary, makes politics a fun spectacle. Better to feel duped by Trump than by Hilary, who really did have the potential to pull the wool over our eyes. And isn't this the very crux of being duped, that depending on how much we see through what the other is hiding, we can imagine the possibility of an alternative political act of any sort. For the dupee, directness is a strangely contradictory master-signifier in that the perceived failure of a present Master triggers the frantic search for a successor who better fits the master-signifier. However, attempts to change the master-signifier, such as 'Mr Nice Guy' Obama, 'Celebrity' Ronald Reagan, are not always to be found in the not always unfertile soil of politics.

Although an elected President, the impact of Trump has, for a long time, been undeniably negative as this critique from 2000 observes:

In the field of social ecology, men like Donald Trump are permitted to proliferate freely, like another species of algae, taking over entire districts of New York and Atlantic City; he 'redevelops' by raising rents, thereby driving out tens of thousands of poor families, most of whom are condemned to homelessness, becoming the equivalent of the dead fish of environmental ecology.<sup>11</sup>

Trump's politics inevitably guarantees outrage even from some traditional conservatives. His scarcely articulate, trigger happy tweets are not what we expect from a President, their vacuity brings to mind Lacan's distinction between full and empty speech.<sup>12</sup> Yet we are stuck with his huge bumbling ego, perversely more concerned with retaining power than engaging with the political welfare of the state. We feel duped by this unlovely, capitalist misogynist and frustrated by his incompetence to lead a nation. Yet what happens in the USA has huge social, cultural and political effects on many other parts of the world. The trauma of being duped by Trump is made worse by his ongoing, looming presence in the media who are, it seems, always probing for some sort of knowledge presumed to be had by Trump.

What does it mean to be duped and do we have a choice in the matter? Arguably, as Lacan signals, we have at least, an unconscious choice. In *Seminar XXI: The Non-Duped Err/The Name of the Father* Lacan claims that the masochist 'invents' himself through a particular interpellation of the knotting of the Symbolic order (see Figure 1 below) where the speaking subject is enabled to speak meaningfully, in so far as making sense is the extimate (inside/outside) condition which gives the speaking subject an intention to speak. We can say that it is within this Symbolic structure that the duper operates in a procedure which provides the dupee with – if nothing else – Phallic enjoyment.<sup>13</sup> Here the dupee, in order to enjoy, must be willing to be duped. The duper is deliberately staging an err(or) which although not in itself a mistake for the duper, it is for the dupee if thought of as an err(or). In making this *mis-take* the dupee literally misses the take of the dup-er which is the dupee's willingness, in demanding to be duped, not to be missed (that is, not to be overlooked). The (or) of err(or) is a retrospective realisation of the dupee. 'Or' designates the fantasy of choice which was never available to the dupee until after the duping.

However, in *Seminar XIV* Lacan offers a possible way out for the dupee:

Precisely, your demand, the one that herds you in here, is how to have a chance to get out of this stupidity. This is even what you are counting on me for. Except for the fact that this demand forms part of the stupidity.<sup>14</sup>

Lacan is not saying that non-dupes do not make mistakes, which is clearly not the case. Rather, his seminar engages how the subject harbours the extimate space

provided by the nexus of the three registers of Imaginary, Symbolic and Real as a location in which even the non-dupe cannot avoid mishaps. We are prone to be duped and only then can we understand that we have been, asserts Lacan. Therefore, what differentiates the dupe from the non-dupe is not some additional awareness or insight, but rather a willingness to distinguish between the three registers of the Symbolic Order as a way of comprehending different aspects of what might constitute the possibility of truth.<sup>15</sup>

Lacan understands the Symbolic Order as an intra-psychoic structure made up of the three aforementioned registers. The Imaginary is described by Miller as the relation “between the ego and its images.”<sup>16</sup> In this relation the subject’s post-mirror stage conscious sense of self is exposed as a misrecognition, its apparent internalised egoic self-image of being made whole through identification with the Other, being a fiction. The Symbolic, on the other hand, relies upon the formation of a web of signifiers which in language “determine[s] the order of the subject.”<sup>17</sup> Lacan claims that “man speaks therefore, but it is because the symbol has made him man.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, “symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him.”<sup>19</sup> The function of the Symbolic is through discourse (including the unconscious discourse of the Other), to organise the speaking subject in the world in relation to other speaking subjects. By contrast, the Real refers to that which, in resisting all representation in the Symbolic, cannot be totally symbolised. These three registers are knotted together to form the Symbolic Order, as shown in Figure 1.

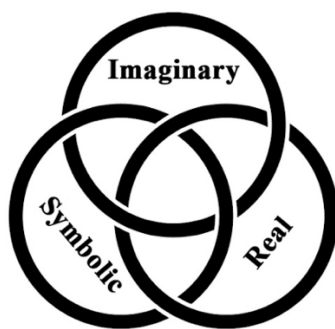
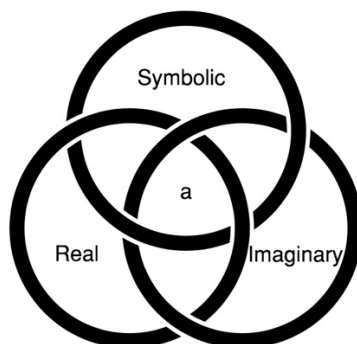


Figure 1: Lacan’s three registers of the Symbolic Order

What keeps these registers knotted together and in relation to each other is the central point, a hole at the centre which is called *objet a* or the object cause of desire, as in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Lacan's three registers and *objet a*

We can best think of the *objet a* as a partial object, in so far as it is the image of an object generated by alienation and reconfigured through fantasy. It is this fantasy of an object, inclusive of subject, which in standing in for desire, is also its cause. For Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire is problematic in that its object is ambivalent and opaque: we are not quite sure what desire is, but it nevertheless apprehends us. We know that there is *something* to be desired but this something cannot be wholly encapsulated in an object. So, we go on searching for an evasive object which maybe doesn't even exist, knowing very well that whatever object we might locate as a placeholder for the *objet a* will never fully satisfy. Yet we remain willing to take the risk of being duped by the partial object. It is this willingness to be duped by the strange, albeit false freedom proffered via the *objet a*, that politics in general and Trump in particular, exploit.

In this scenario we feel permitted to wander, as Lacan observes even “the unduped wander/are mistaken.”<sup>20</sup> What exactly are we wandering around? The most probable answer is around Phallic enjoyment, the insistence of the Other that we enjoy *his* jouissance. Lacan is clear that not only is the Phallic signifier one of *jouissance* but also that it represents an exception in the signifying chain because without it, other signifiers could not signify anything.<sup>21</sup> We might say that in circulating (wandering around) the *objet a*, this false freedom set up by command of the Master, we are circulating *his* jouissance. When we think of the Master, it is of a specific discourse which claims to represent all other discourses. The Master purports that he alone is the Master signifier and is the subject for all signifiers. However, a scrutiny of Figure 2 reveals that it is the *objet a* which holds the Symbolic Order together. Moreover, it is the *objet a* which, in searching for the object of desire, produces an

abundance of meaning, often too much, in fact what we might call a surplus of *jouissance*.

In the case of Trump there is a problematic flipside to the duper/dupee structure. Both supporters and critics of Trump are categorised by the degree to which they are willing to be duped, while at the same time accepting that being duped is inevitably part of the nature and game of politics. However, by simply calling Trump stupid as a means to position oneself as either apolitical or somehow beyond politics, is to seriously underestimate the problem of Trump.

For USA politics freedom is a visionary construct, an ideological undertaking articulated in its very constitution and thus a ready-made source of surplus *jouissance*. At the Symbolic level, lies America's history of fighting for particular freedoms in which individuals and groups have even been willing to die, where death itself constitutes the very act of freedom.<sup>22</sup> Thus freedom is a social location, demonstrating both in Symbolic and Imaginary terms the relations between social structures, ideology and politics. Freedom is further understood as a pragmatics where ideals are upheld in the preservation of its history and desired destiny. In these ways, generations preserve their nuanced version of freedom via the strategies available to them, whether these be ideological, institutional, organisational and so on. Aware of the pitfalls of any uncritical upsurge of consciousness which privileges nationalistic freedom, Fanon writes,

Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie.<sup>23</sup>

Of this *bourgeoisie* Fanon suggests,

In order to hide this stagnation and to mask this regression, to reassure itself and to give itself something to boast about, the bourgeoisie can find nothing better to do than to erect grandiose buildings in the capital and to lay out money on what are called prestige expenses.<sup>24</sup>



Does not Trump Towers here come to mind as an emblem of Phallic sovereignty to nationalistic freedom?

How to define *jouissance* is an ongoing conundrum for Lacanians in the English-speaking world because the commonly understood translation as excessive enjoyment bordering on pain, fails to include its nuanced implication, that of the divided subject's attempts to make *jouissance* its' will, that as speaking subjects we are compelled and driven towards *jouissance* even, and especially if, we know that there is a limit to the amount of pleasure we can bear. Implicit within *jouissance* is a kind of suffering the subject at some stage will inevitably experience; when for example pleasure transforms into disgust. Of *jouissance* Lacan says that it is a pleasure which "necessarily stops us at a certain point, at a respectful distance from *jouissance*"<sup>25</sup> and that it is "always of the order of tension, of forcing, of expenditure, even of exploit. *Jouissance* is undoubtedly there at the point where pain begins to appear."<sup>26</sup>

Lacan is clear that although *jouissance* is an attempt to satisfy the subject's drive, the attainment of the *objet a* is impossible, which is in itself, traumatic.<sup>27</sup> The drive is not therefore towards satisfaction but rather towards repetition and hystericisation manifesting as *jouissance*. In the case of Trump, we might say that while some enjoy his authority, others enjoy expressing their outrage, both of which are over time caught in an ongoing circuit of repetition and intensification. Therefore, we can say at this point that Trump is the *objet a*, that which produces the inscription of *jouissance* for the outraged hysteric.

Our will towards such an inscription of *jouissance* is a specific command both dupes and non-dupes take up because it lies in the Symbolic, ready-made for everyone, with enjoyment apparently guaranteed, notwithstanding we well know this does not last. For we have to continually reinvent *jouissance* by always seeking a better one. But what happens when the Master insists upon the command itself being the source of our *jouissance*? How do we as subjects handle this, when the initial *jouissance* (whether of elation or disgust) begins to fade? We do it by keeping the Master, who has been symbolically thrust upon us, relevant through nurturing our "richness of the tongue"<sup>28</sup> so that others will hear us. Although we cannot know *jouissance* we might be able to glean some knowledge about the Master who purports to hand it out. In the case of Trump there is an uncanny pleasure of

*jouissance* at play: there is a strange familiarity about Trump. It is at such moments when many are either disgusted or elated by Trump that this familiar figure becomes strangely foreign.

What if the Other, that is the Master, is stupid? This question posed some time ago by Pluth and Hoens,<sup>29</sup> does not invoke any particular political standpoint, but rather, as Soler explains, singles out stupidity as a marker of the fervent uptake of Phallic *jouissance*:

Now, if masculine desire ends at (*a*), we can add that the *jouissance* of man is phallic *jouissance*. Phallic *jouissance* is the *jouissance* of the idiot [...]. The common meaning of 'idiot' designates a person who is not clever. This is not the meaning which Lacan gives to the word here. The idiot is someone whom we can sometimes see in hospitals; he is the one who dedicates himself to his penis, the one who is alone with his own *jouissance* - that of his own organ. This is the idiot, not linked with the other, outside of the social tie. Phallic *jouissance* is autistic – in itself – and this is why, when Lacan stresses the puissance of phallic *jouissance* in the sexual relation between a man and a woman, he is saying that the man does not really enjoy the body of the woman. He enjoys his own organ, which is why it is possible to say that the sexual relation has no meaning. It is outside of meaning and without ties even.<sup>30</sup>

Whenever it is said that Trump is stupid, which is frequently, what invokes our *jouissance* is not the matter of whether Trump is in fact stupid, but rather the fantasy of finding out one way or another that *we* are not stupid ones. However, this *jouissance* becomes all too much once we do realise that we may have been duped. In this way, declaring that Trump is stupid is merely a fragment, an iteration which we keep repeating as we, including the media, circulate the trauma of his ineptitude.

This is what constitutes a substantial part of the *jouissance* of Trump. But what exactly are we enjoying here? We perceive that Trump considers himself commanding, the issuer of commands which even if lacking eloquence, are to be uncritically taken up and enjoyed. Yet his speech is in the most literal sense, a failure. Transcriptions of his speeches circulated in social media are testament to his ridiculous and illogical word salad. To be clear, Trump's speeches are not the traditional kind we've come to expect. Rather he adopts a 'direct talking' to a portion of the population who think and talk just like him. It is this very method which made

him electable (Symbolic), horrifyingly identifiable (Real) for his supporters and utterly outrageous (Imaginary) for his critics. These ongoing, frustratingly comical moments illustrate how far Trump as Master signifier is dissociated from the signified, how far the first moment of *jouissance* (his position of President) is from the final unbearable *jouissance* of his incapacity and total unsuitability to be President. The *jouissance* of speech (the 'blah blah' as Lacan calls it) has in Trump acquired a new horizon, that of being totally divorced even from any intention of meaningful speech. The inscription of the unbearable *jouissance* which has replaced the original anticipation of *jouissance*, now lies in an almost inarticulate speaking subject who keeps repeating himself.

Whenever we put another speaking subject in the position of Master we are implicitly awaiting the command to enjoy, as Lacan pointed out to the May '68 students: "what you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new master. You will get one [*ce que vous voulez c'est un maître. Vous l'aurez*]." The May '68 spectacle, although caught up in a fantasy of itself as valorising the uptake of a certain ethical *jouissance*, merely set the scene for yet another hegemonic culture disguised as a more social integration and not one of absolute difference. Such fantasy always underpins crises and the need to address it risks structural ethical deformity, as Trump's response to the covid-19 pandemic well illustrates:

I don't take responsibility for it at all... We have it totally under control. It's one person coming in from China.<sup>31</sup>

Trump is certainly no revolutionary (or even counter-revolutionary) and never purported to be, but it seems abundantly apparent that he does enjoy acting out the discourse of the Master. Because for him, indeed of many in America and elsewhere, capitalism is the signifier for a kind of freedom (that is, any knowledge of freedom or unfreedom is via the conduit of capitalism), he is the most comfortable when advocating the idea of freedom in terms of capitalism, albeit with sufficient minimal limits, limits which guarantee a semblance of consensus and order, whilst remaining essentially disorganised and controversial. Unlike his predecessor, the apparently reliable, friendly liberal Obama, with whose politics we could disagree without feeling threatened, Trump presents as the self-appointed, stern name-of-the-father for whom we secretly yearn, just so we can hate him. Trump's memorably clumsy tweets denote a speaking subject who insists on being located in a position of authority, one

who whilst inserting prohibition and eliciting hate, nevertheless as name-of-the-father, stands in for the signifier which bestows subjective identity through guaranteeing access to language. Frosh claims that our secret longing for a Master devolves from “the key issue of the ‘*pas-tout* (not-whole)’: the Freudian revolution is that which has no ambitions to total knowledge, but allows for the fallen, divided subject. Without this *pas-tout*, there will always be demand for a master.”<sup>32</sup> What Lacan proposed is that the origin of any truly social revolution must lie in psychoanalysis rather than the politics of state, because only psychoanalysis has the potential to reveal the misrecognition of looking to the Master for change and transformation. However, the likes of Trump bring a new kind of frustration to the subject because whether we crave revolution or the *status quo*, whether we like him or not, we know very well that his time will pass, yet we continue to count on his self-authorisation as Master for our *jouissance*, notwithstanding that this *jouissance* emanates from his trademark divisiveness.

For Lacan the name-of-the-father, notwithstanding its impossibility, is no empty reference, being a traditional metaphor which embodies a principle of method whose function is to direct and verify. As Jacques-Alain Miller explains:

Every time Lacan refers to the Name-of-the-Father, he refers to the tradition that the Name-of-the-Father itself upholds. This connection corroborates that the Name-of-the-Father was not invented by psychoanalysis, but that it is a legacy of a culture among other human cultures. Roman Catholicism speaks of God as a father, the Father *par excellence* [emphasis added].<sup>33</sup>

Here the paternal function of the name-of-the-father is obvious and as Miller points out, its location within discourse can be striking:

As those who are bereft of father, whom never knew their father, the Name-of-the-Father has, in this case, acquired an even stronger force since it was unable to compare the Name-of-the-Father with the dejected husband of the mother. As we see in analysis, they suffer not so much of the lack but of the presence since the paternal ideal holds extreme weight: they suffer of the Name-of-the-Father. Sometimes there is a great relief in finding out that all this was a fabrication of the maternal myth. The fall of the Name-of-the-Father as the support of the Ideal may indeed bring great solace.

Thus, in Lacan, the concept of the Name-of-the-Father links the Freudian Oedipus complex to the myth of Totem and Taboo in the paternal metaphor. They fit together in a very elegant way, the Oedipus complex, the myth of Totem and Taboo—as far as it introduces the father as a dead father—and the castration complex. The strength of the paternal metaphor resides in uniting these three aspects of Freud's teaching.

At the same time, the Name-of-the-Father is an element of the general theory of the name, linguistics and mathematical logic; it belongs to the general theory of proper names.<sup>34</sup>

In considering the name-of-the-father from the perspective of linguistics, Lacan points out that in English and German a name, unlike a noun, is always a proper name and thus a signifier which enables subjective identification through acting as “the mooring point of something from which the subject constitutes himself”.<sup>35</sup> It seems that for Lacan the proper name, through repeatedly standing in for the object of its reference, becomes a placeholder for the speaking subject who, although caught within the battery of all other signifiers, can nevertheless be accorded subjective identity. The proper name is thus not the culmination of these signifiers but rather that which allows them to be revealed in the Symbolic order as an existent subject. Furthermore, what makes the subject available to these signifiers is the will to *jouissance*, which is where we get back to the proper name, that of *Trump*.

He is the speaking subject many love and perhaps many more love to hate, yet we are all forced to contend with the emptiness of his words and the incompetence of his speech in the face of the power they would otherwise be deemed to wield, for example headlines such as “Trump's rhetoric will make the pandemic worse. Words are now a matter of life and death.”<sup>36</sup> Although plainly a failed name-of-the-father, Trump nevertheless continues to exert a strange will to *jouissance*. In directly linking the name-of-the-father with *jouissance*, Miller states

the argument of The Name of the Father becomes the answer to the question: ‘What am I (*Je*)?’ We find it in The Subversion of the Subject..., namely that ‘I am in the place of *jouissance*.’ This is Lacan's answer.<sup>37</sup>

Lacan ends session XV of *Seminar XXI* with this remark, "It is necessary to be a dupe, namely to stick, to stick to the structure",<sup>38</sup> in other words, not to wander about trying to find in the structure of life the will to *jouissance*. This follows an earlier remark at the end of session III, "the good dupe, the one who does not err, must have somewhere a Real of which she is the dupe",<sup>39</sup> which brings to mind the saying that if you look around the room and cannot identify the idiot, it is probably you. Within *jouissance* the subject is always duped because this is where the subject is entangled within the Imaginary of the social bond. For example, Trump's cynical insistence on his gut feeling, his faith that he alone sees through 'fake news', political ideology and opposition, expert opinion and even scientific consensus (as in the case of covid-19), thereby establishing ostensibly him as the most desirable and omniscient Master. Anything outside this scenario is a fiction which only dupes would fall for. Here perhaps the joke is on Trump's over-confident identification with his ideal-ego, because he remains just as interpellated within the social as the rest of us, being inescapably invested in the very things which, through invoking a self-ascribed superiority, he is attempting to distance himself from. As Hegel reminds us in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*<sup>40</sup>, to claim differentiation, to be truly different, one must pursue indifference. For Hegel, the one who is truly duped is the one who reacts with cynicism.

In a curious reinterpretation of roles Trump can be seen as playing the part of court jester to a population duped by his masterful buffoonery into underestimating the real threat of his agenda, being driven both by his *jouissance* of power and our *jouissance* in, one or another, indulging it. This is a reduction of the Other's *jouissance* to the libidinal economy of Phallic *jouissance*, one which, at least in the eyes of the Master, should never fail. There is no complete satisfaction to be had within *jouissance* because our inevitable lack of satisfaction is exactly what *jouissance* hinges upon. It is specifically the will towards *jouissance* which dupes us into the structure of being a speaking subject in the world. We are already in the position of a dupee before we realise that we are being tricked both by language and by Trump. It seems that in being our favourite stupid Other, Trump is one of today's most pleasure-producing subjects whose *jouissance*, in so far as this resides in ultimate refusal of him, unwittingly bolsters the spectacle of him as Master.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> J. Lacan, *Seminar XV: The Psychoanalytic Act*, C. Gallagher [Trans.] (London: Karnac, (1973 [2002]), p.20.
- <sup>2</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/13/coronavirus-donald-trump-presidency-sick-joke>
- <sup>3</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/>
- <sup>4</sup> Presidential Announcement, Trump Tower, New York, June 2015. Accessed from: <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/donald-trump-quotes>
- <sup>5</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html>. Additional evidence of Trump's unrepentant misogyny is his repeated recent "best wishes" to Ghislaine Maxwell who, as socialite former partner Jeffrey Epstein is currently facing charges of sex trafficking teenage girls. Given this context Trump's claim to be "not really following" the global outrage of the sexual abuse of teenager girls ineptly compounds his misogyny.
- <sup>6</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/05/worst-president-ever/>
- <sup>7</sup> J. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, A. Sheridan [Trans.]. (New York: Norton and Norton, (1973 [1998]) p.81.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.56
- <sup>9</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/412509/trump-insists-economy-can-restart-soon-despite-spread-of-covid-19>
- <sup>10</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/22/trump-coronavirus-response-criticism-us-cases>
- <sup>11</sup> P-F Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, I. Pindar & P. Sutton [Trans.].( London: The Athlone Press, 2000 )43.
- <sup>12</sup> Lacan (1977-1979) says that "full speech is a speech full of meaning [*sens*]. Empty speech is a speech which has only signification." *Le Séminaire. Livre XXIV. L'insu que sait de l'une bévue s'aile à mourre, 1976-77*, Ornica?, pp.12-18, p. 11. Trump's tweets sidestep the normal news media and information channels, providing direct and ongoing immediate connection with the public: the medium is the message and, the message is the medium.
- <sup>13</sup> J. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p.20.
- <sup>14</sup> J. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p.60.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> J-A. Miller, (Translator's Note. *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p.280.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.279. It is important to note that in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis the ultimate signifier is the Phallus, which brings language into being and produces an image.
- <sup>18</sup> J. Lacan, "Symbol and Language", In *The Language of the Self* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1956) p.39.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.42.
- <sup>20</sup> J. Lacan, *Seminar XV: The Psychoanalytic Act*, p.21.
- <sup>21</sup> J. Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire", in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. B. Fink [Trans.]. New York: Norton, (1960[2002]), pp.671-702.

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- <sup>22</sup> In Seminar XXI, *Les Non-Dupes Errent* (1973-1974) Lacan claims that death is in the domain of the Real because it signals the end of desire. (C. Gallagher [Trans.]. Unpublished Manuscript, Lesson of 11th December, 1973, p. 15). Being willing to die for one's cause, to will oneself to such a finality, is where the Symbolic and the Real fail. This is made especially poignant by Lacan's reference to Freud's topography of the body as "a locus of silence... it says nothing. It is the place of silence" (Ibid., Session XIV, p. 4). It is this silence which complicates the body as fully knowable and ready to be risked. As Lacan later hints what constitutes this risk is when the ego, taken over by an excess of intensity, makes us feel truly alive only when we risk dying for a cause.
- <sup>23</sup> F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, R. Philcox [Trans.]. (Paris: François Maspero, (1961 [2004]), p.112.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.11
- <sup>25</sup> J. Lacan, *Psychanalyse et médecine. Lettres de L'Ecole Freudienne* 1, (1967). pp.34–61, p.46.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> J. Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, D. Porter [Trans.]. New York: Norton, (1959-1960 [1997]). Lacan makes it increasingly clear during his seminar that not all trauma is necessarily obvious; it can be unseen, unspoken or only partially known.
- <sup>28</sup> J. Lacan, (*Les Non-Dupes Errent*. C. Gallagher [Trans.]. Unpublished Manuscript, Lesson 1. 1973-1974), p.22. Lacan then goes on to say, "And I would even go further – it is a richness that not all tongues have, but this indeed is why they are varied."
- <sup>29</sup> E. Pluth, & D. Hoens, "What if the Other is Stupid? Badiou and Lacan on 'Logical Time'", in P. Hallward [Ed.]. *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*. (New York, Continuum, 2004) Pluth and Hoens contend that the Other can be rendered stupid via the will towards an act. We can presume that an act, any act, is arguably preceded by an anticipatory *jouissance* and thus is a will towards stupidity.
- <sup>30</sup> C. Soler, "Some Remarks on The Love Letter", *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research* 4, (1994), pp.12-13.
- <sup>31</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- <sup>32</sup> S. Frosh "Everyone Longs for a Master: Lacan and 1968", in G.K. Bhabra & I.Demir I. (Eds.). *1968 in Retrospect*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.100.
- <sup>33</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.lacan.com/symptom12/the-non.html>
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> J. Lacan, *Seminar IX. Identification*, C. Gallagher [Trans.] (London: Karnac, (1961-1962 [2002]), p.48.
- <sup>36</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/global/commentisfree/2020/mar/13/trump-coronavirus-antivaxxer-vaccine>
- <sup>37</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.lacan.com/symptom12/the-non.html>
- <sup>38</sup> J. Lacan, *Les Non-Dupes Errent*, p.17.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., Lesson 3, p.20.



<sup>40</sup> “The cut of my coat is decided by fashion, and the tailor sees to this; it is not my business to invent it, for mercifully others have done so for me. This dependence on custom and opinion is certainly better than were it to be on nature. But it is not essential that men should direct their understanding to this; indifference is the point of view which must reign, since the thing itself is undoubtedly perfectly indifferent. Men are proud that they can distinguish themselves in this, and try to make a fuss about it, but it is folly to set oneself against the fashion. In this matter, I must hence not to decide myself, nor may I draw it within the radius of my interests, but simply do what is expected of me.” *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, p.484.