

New Migrations of the Subject in Capitalist Discourse

In every era, cultural malaise is expressed through movements of the subject. The questions to ask today are: how do these migrations of the subject manifest in the contemporary context, and what effects do they have on the subject? What type of social bond is produced, and what is the relationship between symptom, jouissance, and desire in our time?

We live in an age marked by a profound reconfiguration of the social bond, under the influence of capitalist discourse. Technology, now an omnipresent third party, interferes in our relationships, modifies our modes of jouissance, and redraws the coordinates of desire.

In this context, we must ask: how is the subject still articulated through language? How is alterity sustained? And what is the current status of castration as a structuring operator?

Relying on two contemporary phenomena — the Anonymous and undocumented migrants — we propose to interrogate them as social symptoms, as paradigmatic figures of the new migrations of the subject within capitalist discourse. Both, in different ways, embody the effects of the anonymization process linked to mass individualism.

Displacement in Virtuality: Anonymous, a Faceless Otherness

In virtual space, the psychoanalytic subject dissolves into a de-identified mass: it loses its name, body, and history. The figure of the Anonymous condenses this logic: a pixelated, faceless collectivity whose emblem — the Guy Fawkes mask (V for Vendetta) — functions as an empty signifier, as the objet a, as an elusive gaze-object, with no identifiable Other.

From the Mirror Stage to the Screen Stage

If the mirror stage, as formulated by Lacan, founded identity in the specular image and recognition by the big Other, today the screen complicates this function — both in the inaugural moments and in later logical instances where the image the subject receives from the Other matters.

This mutation generates unprecedented clinical effects: the knotting of the Image by the signifier Name-of-the-Father is altered. A borderless capture occurs, an identity sustained by a diffuse symbolic anchoring — a return to the image without a sign.

Rather than unifying, the screen fragments the image into multiple avatars. The question “Who is looking at me?” is now addressed to algorithms, anonymous users, or surveillance cameras — a gaze without an Other, not specularizable, generating a constant experience of the Unheimlich. With this digital double, the avatar becomes uncanny: a rupture emerges between the virtual image and the real body.

Fragmentation and Addictive Jouissance

On social networks, jouissance circulates within an addictive circuit of quantifiable validation. In this logic, demand seems to take precedence over desire: demand becomes endless — likes, views, numerical recognition.

The Other, which once embodied the Law, vanishes, replaced by a system of limitless equivalences. The result: an offstage position, where virtual acting replaces the return of the real with a discharge of unlimited jouissance, staging the collapse of the Other through addictive repetition.

In this seamless continuum that constitutes the connected world, many adolescents adopt a particular subjective position, refuting structural castration: less phi ($-\phi$), they become Unphallus or Incels (involuntary celibates...). That is, a subject not structured by lack, but captured in a drive circuit without the mediation of the Other.

This position manifests clinically in cyberacting: acts performed in virtuality that impact the real without the subject managing to symbolize what they execute. There is no mythical scene, no mediating function of the Other; the act emerges as a drive discharge, as a pure act-out, in a space where real and virtual merge. The public scene is full of examples of these drive overflows.

Violence, Jouissance, and Algorithmic Capture

We are witnessing a growing confusion between virtuality and reality, especially in contexts of extreme violence, criminality, or terrorism, where adolescents are recruited through social networks, often by anonymous collectives with immersive video game aesthetics (avatars, missions, scoring).

These youths “play” with death as if it were a network challenge, with no symbolic Other functioning as a limit or Law.

Violence thus becomes an extreme attempt at inscription in the real — a desperate attempt at subjectivation.

This phenomenon reveals the radicalization of the contemporary symptom: the subject no longer seems to rely on speech, but on the act; no longer inscribed in a desiring dimension governed by lack, but in a drive discharge mediated by algorithmic interfaces.

Far from being marginal, this phenomenon imposes itself as a symptom of the era: a subject without a symbolic scene, held illusorily by the screen in a virtual scene, caught between fascination with the image and the death drive, without the mediation of castration.

The Undocumented: Loss of the Symbolic Field

In contrast to the hypervirtual presence of the Anonymous, undocumented migrants embody the opposite pole: a radical remainder excluded from language and the social bond.

Expelled from the field of rights, deprived of any form of institutional recognition, these subjects are inscribed in the Real as disposable or sacrificial objects.

From Desiring Subject to Waste-Object

The undocumented are not recognized as subjects by the symbolic Other, but as uninscribed objects — residues of a system that produces surplus-value and jouissance, while excluding structuring castration.

What cannot be named returns in the form of violence: in detention camps, deadly migration routes, bodies without history.

Exile of the Subject and the Return of the Real

This exclusion produces a desubjectivation through lack of address to the Other, distinct from foreclosure: it is an exile of the subject. The fundamental signifier S1 that would allow its inscription — its name, legal status, recognition by the Other — falls away. This is a loss of the symbolic field not articulated to the desire of the Other: the subject is exiled from itself, with no possible site of enunciation.

The return of this exclusion occurs in the real of migrant bodies: numbers, shipwrecks, massive displacements.

In this clinic of precarity, one observes desubjectivation, paradoxical delusions, losses of anchoring that take the place of any possibility of historicization.

The uncanny diffuses as a political climate, as a shared social affect.

Contemporary Subjectivity: Between Fluidity and Exclusion

These two figures — Anonymous and the undocumented — delineate the contours of a new subjective condition: between identity fluidity (avatars, non-binary genders, digital anonymity) and radical exclusion (no name, no rights, no recognition of desire).

In both cases, there is an increasing difficulty in inscribing lack:

A rejection of castration and the unconscious.

An unbounded jouissance (Anonymous, Unphallus),

Or an absolute void of symbolic inscription (undocumented).

It is this tension between excess and exclusion that produces new forms of malaise in civilization.

Clinic of the Anonymous Symptom: An Ethics of the Singular

Faced with these phenomena, psychoanalytic clinic must not yield to the adaptive temptation, but instead rescue the singularity of the symptom as a creation of the subject. It is not about restoring a failed big Other or offering social solutions.

Our task is to read the symptom — that place where the subject can still inscribe itself as singularity, sustain castration, and write its name where it has been erased.

This implies a rigorous ethics: not yielding to mass anonymity or victimization.

To work with the subject — not with the victim or the avatar — so that they may accommodate lack, division, and singularity.

Conclusion: Castration as Compass

Castration no longer seems to operate as the Law of the Father, but as an excluded remainder (undocumented) or as an excess of jouissance (Anonymous).

The contemporary subject oscillates between these two poles: evaporation into the mass or expulsion from discourse.

Our clinic, more than ever, must interrogate how the subject manages with this big Other who no longer embodies castration as limit, and how — despite this — the subject may still sustain a desiring position, encore.