

DESIRE IN THE ERA OF NEOLIBERALISM: A LACANIAN READING OF HAYNES' [SAFE]

Claudia Di Gianfrancesco

Email: cdigia02@mail.bbk.ac.uk
Affiliation: Birkbeck University of London

Summary: In this paper, Lacanian psychoanalysis is employed to critically discuss notions concerning the subject's desire in the era of neoliberalism. To do so, a quote by Margaret Thatcher is analysed through Lacan's University discourse. By critically reflecting on this quote, neoliberal narratives surrounding accountability, 'perfectibility' and consumerism are explored through Lacanian theory. Parallels between Todd Haynes' movie [SAFE] and Lacan's notions of 'divided subject' and desire are critically reviewed within the neoliberal-University frame. The paper focuses on investigating how desire is exploited and manipulated by neoliberalism. It is argued that, in the neoliberal-University discourse, Lacan's divided subject (\$) – identified in Haynes' movie with the character of Carol – deals with a particular type of alienation resulting from the demand of the neoliberal master for a whole, perfect subject (a). The Carol/\$ is silenced within the modern neoliberal-University discourse, drowned by a constant noise (voice). In the final section, Kristeva's and Ettinger's notions of abjection and matrix respectively are discussed to forward both ways in which it is possible to resist the master signifier of neoliberalism; and to criticize Lacan's conception of subjectivity.

Keywords: Lacanian psychoanalysis, University discourse, neoliberalism, perfectibility, Ettinger, Kristeva, abject, object link, feminist theory.

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"Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul"
(Thatcher, 1981¹)

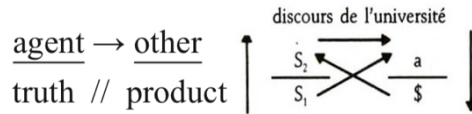
Neoliberalism as Lacan's University discourse

Margaret Thatcher's quote above effectively summarizes the neoliberal thought which started spreading in both Europe and America around the 1980s (Harvey, 2005). At its core is the belief that, thanks to 'economics' and the free market, a new global order with a new

1. 1981 May 1st, Margaret Thatcher, Interview for the *Sunday Times*. Accessed on the 27th of October 2018 from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104475>

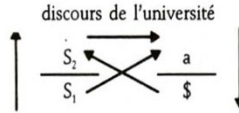
subject will be installed (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism permeates virtually every social field: health, education, media. The ‘subservient’ role played by these various social institutions have transformed this ‘economic theory [into] a much broader ideology’ (Verhaeghe, 2014: 114).

This conceptualisation of neoliberalism as a pervasive ideology aiming to change people’s ‘hearts and souls’ can be further investigated through a Lacanian lens. In 1969-70, Lacan introduces four discourses – Master, Hysteric, University, and Analyst. In modernity for Lacan the Master’s discourse had been replaced by the University one (Lacan, 1969-70; Fink, 1998). The signifier ‘*university*’ does not merely symbolize the actual university ‘as a social institution’, but it was rather meant to stand for the ‘hegemonic discourse’ (Žižek, 1997/2006) in which the ‘modern master’ (Lacan 1969-70: 31/34) is now hiding behind a ‘supposedly neutral knowledge’ (Zupančič, 2006: 168). Here, the master, hidden in the position of truth (S1), addresses impossible ‘fully realised neoliberal subject[s]’ (*a*) thus producing as a ‘by-product [...] alienated and split-subject[s]’ (\$) (Clarke, 2012: 54) whom accept the knowledge with which s/he is providing them (Neill, 2013: 344).



Bearing in mind that the understanding of a certain discourse and the meaning gathered from it is always on the side of the receiver, it ‘is always *my* meaning’ (Neill, 2013: 337, emphasis in text), the analysis below is employed to introduce the discourse surrounding desire in the era of neoliberalism rather than actually accounting for what Thatcher meant.

The University-neoliberal discourse: omnipresent master and 'neutral' knowledge



In the place that Lacan terms the locus of ‘truth’ (1969-70: 54-68/61-77) it is possible to situate the master signifier (S1) of ‘*economics*’. As mentioned above, neoliberalism, due to its omnipresence, plays a pivotal role in defining individuals and subjectivity (Verhaeghe, 2014). In the neoliberal era, everything must be understood through economy and the free market. There is therefore an inextricable connection between the discourse of economy and that of neoliberalism. In the neoliberal era: ‘[t]he free market replaces God and acts as the Other’ which although it advocates for individual freedom it ultimately denies it (McGowan, 2016: 272).

Drawing on Lacan’s (1957: 421/505) re-elaboration of Freud’s (1900: 322-326) concept of displacement – i.e. metonymy – the S1 *economics* can be read as a metonymy standing for neoliberalism. This metonymic linguistic trope enables to posit *neoliberalism* as the actual S1 of Thatcher’s discourse. Neoliberalism in the position of the truth addresses the other (*a*) ‘idealized and objectified subject in the form of the successful [...] neoliberal subject’ (Clarke, 2012: 52). Furthermore, the neoliberal system presents itself ‘not as a system’ but rather as a ‘neutralised and unquestionable’ reality (Neill, 2013: 344). The knowledge (S2) that is at stake in the neoliberal-University discourse is synthesized in the set of practices exploited and produced by neoliberal policies: accountability, ‘perfectability’ and consumerism.

An example of how neoliberal-University discourse produces alienated ‘soul[s]’ is given by Todd Haynes’ (Vachon & Haynes, 1995) [*SAFE*]. In [*SAFE*], Haynes portrays the story of a wealthy white woman Carol, suddenly affected by fumes present in her surroundings. Despite the lack of clear medical reasons behind her health problems, Carol’s illness quickly escalates leading her to decide to retreat to a New Age treatment facility which ‘cures’ people affected by symptoms similar to Carol’s. There, Carol is repeatedly told that she can be better only if she acknowledges that she is responsible for her being unwell. As mentioned above, the idea of accountability where ‘everyone is

responsible for their own success or failure' is key within neoliberal discourses (Verhaeghe, 2014: 113). The subject desired by neoliberalism – the one neoliberalism speaks to – is a perfect, non-lacking, whole subject (*a*). The myth the neoliberal-master (S1) installs – supported by Social Darwinism (S2) – is that of perfectibility. The subject envisioned by neoliberalism must strive for 'perfectibility' (Verhaeghe, 2014: 55-77). Carol strives for this perfection which is demanded by everyone surrounding her. She works out, goes to social events, makes sure her house is impeccable, tries to look flawless by investing time and money in her appearance. However, this demand for perfection and wholeness is an impossible request and neoliberalism relies on this impossibility. This leads the Carol/\$ to desire perfection, while inevitably feeling even more lacking and fragmented (Atasay, 2014).

For Lacan in fact the subject is inexorably lacking and divided. Such splitting is said to be primarily effectuated by the subject's entrance into what Lacan terms the Symbolic order – the realm of law, grammar and language. There, the subject is divided between meaning and being. The language the subject speaks to gain what s/he wants is always alien to it, always necessarily Other. The subject can only be 'conceived or represented by others through the medium of signification' (Neill, 2011: 31). No matter how many words or signifiers one chooses to describe oneself, to tell who s/he is, those will never coincide with one's being. Language as coming from the neoliberal-Other tells the subject-to-be that s/he has to be perfect. As showed in [SAFE], Carol, in a mantra-like fashion, is constantly told that 'she is fine'²; that 'there is nothing wrong with her'. Symbolically, she makes this mantra her own and moves from 'find[ing] [herself] feeling sick' to saying that she feels

2. Script available at: http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/s/safe-script-transcript-julianne-moore.html

‘fine’. However, throughout the movie, Carol looks worse and worse³. Despite saying that she is ‘just fine’, her disintegration – her symbolic alienation – as the movie progresses, becomes increasingly palpable. Carol is confronted with an impossible demand for wholeness from the neoliberal S1. Deprived of her own *voice*, Carol is symbolically split between body and language by the neoliberal-master, by the Other. Throughout the movie, her body appears increasingly ‘detumescent’ (Lacan, 1962-63) – thinner and skinnier in an attempt to let something go – while in her words she becomes even more docile, complying with what she is required to say by the neoliberal-Other.

Carol/\$ believes in what everyone around her has to say about the ‘true’ (S2) reason behind her illness. Without challenging the views of those she believes to *know* what she has – doctors, husband, guru – she silently supports the knowledge and truths (O/)others construct around her. Thus, Carol ends up ultimately embodying the ‘perfect’ neoliberal ideal to whom ‘the very possibility of [being] critically reflective’ is ‘effectively denie[d]’ (Spencer, 2016: 18). She accepts the neoliberal dictum of personal responsibility therefore refusing to acknowledge that there is something wrong outside of herself – i.e. a patriarchal, heteronormative, consumeristic society.

Emblematically, before she begins her journey to ‘cure’, Carol finds a flyer which recites: ‘*Are you allergic to the 20th century?*’. But, this question, rather than leading the subject to identify something wrong in the 20th century's ideological environment, leads her to ‘imagine’ a more concrete threat: fumes. All Carol’s ‘fears’ are metaphorically condensed into a sole obsession for ‘fumes’ rendering her ‘experience of reality much simpler’ (Fiennes & Žižek, 2012). The knowledge (S2)

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supported by the neoliberal-master (S1) remains unchallenged. The movie closes with Carol repeatedly telling her mirror reflection that she loves herself. Believing that the only way to get better – as a doctor ‘confides’ her (S2) – is to accept that she is the reason behind her illness, she surrenders to the neoliberal-master (S1).

Instances of the neoliberal-master’s immanency and unquestionability are easily found in current political discourses.⁴ There too, the master is hidden underneath the presumed neutrality and objectiveness of a force that is said to be above everyone. However, despite the apparent distance with which the S1 is clothed, such master is closer than ever. Not operating as agent, the master ploys from a position of truth thus structuring the whole of the subject’s reality. Its *voice* haunts the subject constantly asking it what is that it desires (Žižek, 2004).

Desire in the neoliberal era: Haynes’ milk and couch

In his article on the mirror stage, Lacan (1949/1965) describes the construction of the infant’s *Ideal-I* – i.e. its imaginary self as reflected in the mirror. The infant experiences itself as a ‘fragmented’ (Lacan, 1949/1965: 78E97) and disorganized self, whom in its encounter with the mirror gains an inaccurate representation (*méconnaissance*) of her/himself which s/he (mis-)takes as her/his true reflection. The images mirrors reflect always appear as completer than how we experience ourselves from within. However, mirrors do not replicate reality as it is, but rather they give back images which are always inevitably distorted, partial, lacking. The mirror reflection is solely superficial (‘exterior [...]’; Lacan, 1949/1965: 76E95) and unable to show what resides inside – organs, thoughts, feelings. The reflected image we gain (‘assume [...]’, 76E94) and identify with is thus always ‘alien’ (Lacan, 1949/1965: 76E95), coming from an ‘Other’ (Fink, 1997: 12). This *ideal-I* generated by the mirror appears statue-like, finite, and thus to some extent perfect compared to the ‘turbulent’ I experienced from within (Lacan, 1949/1965:76E95). For Lacan this is another way in which subjectivity is configured through alienation – imaginary alienation as opposed to symbolic alienation resulting from the subject’s encounter with language. The subject, forms ‘an alienating

4. ‘Well, the market forces will be whatever they are. [...] Market forces, that’s something I don’t want to get involved with. That’s a beautiful -- do me, market forces are a beautiful force’ (Trump, 2016).

identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development' (Lacan, 1949/1965: 78E97).

The mirror reflection – the infant 'double' (Lacan, 1949/1965: 77E95) – because of its perceived finitude, becomes to some extent preferable to the self which is experienced as fragmented. The mirror image is an ideal image which does not worry, which 'has no insufficiencies and which also seems to enjoy the comfort of having nothing to demand or desire' (Nobus, 1998: 117). Pivotaly, this alienating structure of subjectivity also constitutes a way in which the subject can retroactively defend itself from the split experienced through language and law encountered in the symbolic order. The infant forges a 'body-image to a form of [...] totality that I shall call orthopaedic' (Lacan, 1949/1965: 78E97). This 'orthopaedic' function of the *Ideal-I* allows subjects not to fall apart. The desire for unity; the 'primordial jealousy' (Lacan, 1949/1965: 79E98) experienced by the subject for this complete *Ideal-I*; the need to shield oneself from the alienating experience of the symbolic, is what the neoliberal-master exploits in its aim 'to change the heart and soul'.

The Lacanian subject searches that '*Thing*' which will enable her/him to achieve a sense of wholeness and unity. This '*Thing*' is termed by Lacan *objet petit a* (*a*). *Object a* is not a tangible object, but it is rather an elusive concept which escapes representation or in Lacanian terminology symbolization (Neill, 2013). '*Objekt petit a* [is] the Lacanian concept cause of desire [...], it is an empty object that frames the endless set of empirical objects' (Žižek, 1996: 91). As soon as 'this object', which 'embodie[s] all possible enjoyment', is obtained, its capacity for satisfaction will cease, bringing the subject to search for a new object (McGowan, 2016: 101-102). Both Freud and Lacan believed that it is not the object itself which provides fulfilment, but it is rather the quest and the failure to attain such object that produces satisfaction (McGowan, 2016). Thus, it is not in the success praised by neoliberalism that satisfaction is situated but rather in its call for consumption and accumulation, convincing subjects as 'consumers [to] purchase each new commodity with the hope that [the] object [bought] will be the object that will provide the ultimate satisfaction' (McGowan, 2016: 96).

Once again, Haynes' (1995) movie nicely depicts what is discussed above. At the very beginning of the movie, Carol is expecting the arrival of a new couch she has ordered. A few scenes later, in entering her living room, she is struck by the sight of a 'black' couch which 'is not what [she] ordered'. She proceeds to call the furniture company and

later on explains that she had instead ‘ordered teal’. The man at the help desks replies that her ‘original order show[ed] that [she had] ordered black’ to which Carol replies that that is impossible. In another scene, which is framed around those concerning the couch, Carol repeatedly calls for her maid, first asking for her telephone book and then for some milk. She then sits silently, not even paying attention to the book she has found, sipping a glass of cold milk, while in the back we hear a rather haunting music⁵.

These scenes reveal something of Lacan’s notion of desire. The objects Carol seeks are revealed in their incompleteness and inadequacy to satisfy the subject’s desire. Objects, like divided subjects, are split in/by language. ‘Language creates a significant world to which we can relate, but it also makes evident the division of this world from itself. The signifier is not identical with the signified’ (McGowan, 2016). In other words, Carol’s need and demand for ‘milk’ (signifier) cannot fully satisfy her desire for all that it is meant by and beyond milk (signified). The object ‘milk’ is not solely the word and its signification, but also the idea that Carol has of milk. Thus, ‘there is a gap between the word and what it signifies, between the name and the idea of the object or action, and no amount of precision can ever fill this lacuna’ (McGowan, 2016: 70). There is always something extra to that which the subject asks for – demand – this surplus impossible to signify is what Lacan terms desire, *object a* (Neill, 2011: 57).

Focusing on the couch scenes it is possible to appreciate how the subject’s desire for wholeness and the nature of the object of desire are exploited by the neoliberal-master. Carol seeks that object (*a*) which will render her house – with which at some point she seems to identify⁶ – even more perfect, spotless and complete. Neoliberalism (S1) in its University narrative of consumption installs a type of conviction (S2) in which there is a ‘commodity’ which ‘eliminate[s] [...] absence and



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6. Psychiatrist: ‘Do you work? Do you work?’/ Carol: ‘No, I am a house... I am a homemaker’

produce an enduring presence' (McGowan, 2016: 70). Neoliberalism asks its subjects to know what it is that they desire while constantly presenting them with endless possibilities to fulfil whichever desire they may have. Carol feverishly seeks that *thing* which will make her house and ultimately herself complete (*a*). However, such a quest is, according to Lacan impossible, as there is no lost pre-symbolical unity, only lack (Žižek, 1989: 112). Nevertheless, lack should not – as neoliberalism advocates – be conceived as something negative but rather as that which enables the subject to exist, create, desire, to differentiate between the 'I' and 'others'. The issue in the neoliberal era is that the neoliberal-University discourse 'blinds us to the necessity of loss and immerses us in the logic of success' (McGowan, 2016: 26). Subjectivity, in its impossible refusal of lack, is thus statured. There is no space for creativity and art but merely for systematic reproduction. Thus, neoliberal subjects pay a huge toll for their frantic attempt to follow the master and escape the unavoidable encounter with the gap, namely an exacerbated alienation (*a/\$*).

The Subject as 'object a': neoliberal alienation and the perm scene

The neoliberal-master desires a whole subject and demands the perfection it desires. However, the desire that moves this master is impossible, and it is exactly because of this impossibility that the neoliberal-master desires it. Knowing that the divided subject will never obtain the promised unity and satisfaction, the neoliberal-master perpetually reminds people that they must desire, and that it – the neoliberal S1 – has the *thing* which will satisfy them. Neoliberalism 'encourages' its clients to think of themselves as inadequate, as constantly 'sick [...] lacking' positing 'the optimised-self [as] the sole object of desire that the individual perpetually strives to achieve' (*a/\$*) (Atasay, 2014: 288-290). As in language and in the mirror reflection, desire is also always *of* the Other (Neill, 2011). The ideal-I the infant forges for itself is obtained through a constant process of inquiry aimed to guess what it is that the Other wants (Butler, 2000). Not only, '[t]he fantasy of obtaining the object that the Other desires works to convince the subject that it can find satisfying objects' (p. 94) but, it further enables the subject to 'discover' (p. 95) its desire 'constituting [it] as knowable' (McGowan, 2016: 111).

As a neoliberal-client, Carol is constantly asked to desire perfection and wholeness.

Attempting to feel better, she goes to the beauty salon where she is a usual client. There, Carol forges a perfected ideal image of herself by painting her nails and by deciding to – ‘just for a change’ – perm her hair^{7 8}.

Slowly, like Lacan’s infant, she physically builds an armour that can protect her from the alienating forces of language and law imposed by the neoliberal-Other. However, in her search for unity she turns once more to the Other and the image she gazes in the mirror is again alien, created by guessing what the neoliberal-Other wants. Asking herself what it is that the Other wants from her, what is the Other’s desire, she perpetuates the alienation installed by the S1 of neoliberalism: perfection. The neoliberal-Other says it desires whole subjects (other/*a*) and promises them the removal of lack which only accentuates the split and alienation experienced by subjects (product/\$).

Beyond neoliberal and ‘phallic’ subjectivity: the abject and the matrix

The future of the desiring subject depicted in this paper so far is quite a bleak one. How then, can one think of somebody who is able to challenge and resist the pervasive demand to desire characteristic of the neoliberal era? Is Lacan’s model of subjectivity suitable for such an operation? The answer is no, or rather not quite. For a productive rebellion to the neoliberal-master, knowledge needs to be questioned

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and the most suitable candidate for such questioning is the hysteric (Lacan, 1969-70: 34/37; Pavon-Cuellar, 2010: 267). Reflecting on the work of Kristeva, Ettinger and Haynes allows to forward a critique both to the neoliberal ideology and to Lacan's model of subjectivity.

In Carol's attempt to orthopaedically re-dress her lack, something *unheimlich*, something uncanny, something belonging to the Real, is brought to the fore: blood. In the subject's struggle to constitute a perfect self a surplus peaks through. Perpetually chased by the master, and given the possibility to choose unlimited objects to achieve perfection, the subject's desire is sutured. The demand to desire proper of neoliberal ideology, claustrophobically suffocates the subject (Žižek, 2004: 202). Like Lacan's (1958/1965, 524E628) anorexic – who refuses food to obtain space for its own – Carol frantically seeks to escape fumes. However, while the mouth can remain close, nostrils are a rim that cannot be easily shut highlighting the vulnerability of somebody who is unable to escape the pervading presence of the neoliberal-master. Carol needs to let something go, to lose part of herself, to expel part of her "I" to blur and subvert the physical borders of her subjectivity (Kristeva, 1941). Terrified by the sight of her own 'discharge', by the blood that leaks out of her nose as reflected in her mirror image⁹, Carol seeks to escape the omnipresent pervasive neoliberal-master.

The appearance of the abject – i.e. blood – at the moment in which the ego is trying its hardest to comply with the neoliberal-master's demand of perfection allows to pause and critique not only neoliberal policies but further Lacan's model of subjectivity. The abject enables to retroactively challenge all the superimposed formation of subjectivity in which a clear-cut distinction between I/other is required (Kristeva, 1941). Although Lacan (1964-65: 15/12) problematizes a distinction between I/other, this divide is nevertheless predicated on the need of alienation and separation. The subject must distinguish itself



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from the other to gain its own identity. And if Kristeva further attempts to problematizes lack, she falls once again in the trap of symbolic alienation, conceptualising the space of union between I/other as a perverse, negative space (Kristeva, 1941: 15)

Thus, to conceive of a subjectivity which can resist neoliberal demands, the intrusion of this terrific element that breaks the boundaries between subject/other must be read through Ettinger's (2001; 2004; 2006) matrix. Ettinger's (2006: 183) 'matrix', from Latin 'womb' is a place or space of mutual transformation, or in Ettinger's (2006: 102) words of '*metra-morphosis*'. *Metra-* (womb) *morphosis* (formation) is both a 'poietic-artistic process' and 'co-poetic, [...] co-naissance – knowledge of being-born- together' (Ettinger, 2001: 105). Ettinger, (2001; 2006) criticising Freudian and Lacanian perspectives where the Phallic system is 'presented to us as the only one possible, as well as being neutral', (Ettinger, 2006: 43) introduces the matrix and its *metra-morphic* capacity as 'perpetual alternative, not a substitute [to the Phallic paradigm]' (Neill, 2008: 332). The matrix is thus an element situated beyond the phallic – also to be read '*à la lettre*' as 'fallible' (Fink, 2004: 159) – stratum.

With the matrix, or matrixial sphere, Ettinger (2006: 50) offers a new 'gaze' to consider the individual different from the Lacanian 'phallic gaze' in which the 'gaze' becomes either a 'tool for domination' – i.e. post-Oedipal gaze – or a reflection of 'loss through castration' – i.e. phallic *object a*. In Ettinger's (2006: 50) gaze – i.e. matrixial/*object a* – Lacan's *object a*, is to be understood as a 'link' rather than an 'object' (Ettinger, 2006: 63). This linking is what Ettinger (2006: 63) theorises as the encounter between 'I's and non-I's' in which the possibility of connection between different individuals (subjectivity-as-encounter) is emphasised. For Ettinger (2006: 47) the matrix is an act of becoming-together characterised by 'linking and relating'. In the matrixial space both mother and child become together, each changing the other. However, such *metamorphosis* is not limited to the intrauterine experience of mother-child, but is something that, since the individual has necessarily experienced once when in the maternal womb, can retain (Ettinger, 2006). Characteristic for the individual is thus the idea of 'relation', in opposition to the Lacanian perspective where the subject is forever lacking (Neill, 2008). No longer an object nor a space, *object a* is a link, a relation within and between subjects (Ettinger, 2006).

Thus, the abject and the matrix taken together aid the conception of a way to oppose and resist the saturation of desire inaugurated in the

neoliberal era. If Kristeva's abject has opened a space in which the subject can gaze at the internal horrors produced within itself by the neoliberal-master, Ettinger's matrix offers a way to go beyond the Phallus and abjection to regain room for the subject's desire to circulate. Since, in the matrix, '*I* and *non-I*' emerge in 'co-existence', Carol is more than an individual 'I'. She is further constituted by all the other 'non-Is' encountered in her life (Ettinger, 2004; 2006). Conceptualizing *subjectivity-as-encounter*, Carol, as Ettinger's 'subject', has the chance of 'not only come[ing] into being 'through separation'' (Pollock, 2006: 1).

Carol is both body and abject, herself and more than herself. However, the world in which she lives in negates her the possibility of a true connection and relation. Carol is in search of a link with the (m)other (Jacobs & Grant, 2013). While Lacan's divided subject desires an object (*a*) to rectify the lack which is at the basis of its being, for Ettinger – who posits a pre-symbolical *plurality* rather than a pre-symbolical wholeness– desire is not for a '*thing*' but rather for connection with the Other (*link a*) (Ettinger, 2006). A subjectivity which transcends the rigid individual borders of the 'I' challenges not solely Lacan's model of subjectivity but further shuts the individualistic rhetoric proper of the neoliberal-master. Thatcher's idea that 'there is no such thing as society'¹⁰ is thus challenged, enabling the subject to desire beyond the phallic neoliberal containments.

The matrix inaugurates the opening of an-Other space beyond Lacan's Phallus that is not necessarily doomed to fail. Ultimately, neoliberalism and much of psychoanalytic theory – including Lacanian psychoanalysis – have foreclosed the possibility for a subject of connection, a subject whose desire is not as much for a *thing* but rather for connection (*object-link*) (Ettinger, 2006). In both, the possibility of 'becoming-together' is essentially denied. If in neoliberalism there is no space for connection, in Lacan's theory, there is no space for a desire which goes beyond the Oedipal phallic one. Carol is literally suffocated by the neoliberal-master and by a symbolic order which dooms her to feel alienated. In the baby shower scene, we can witness this neoliberal denial of connection at its highest. Carol, with her friends' daughter on her lap has 'one of her most extreme fits of nearly suffocating' (Jacobs & Grant, 2013). A pile of *presents* is opened in front of her eyes, a whole set of new commodities ready – like Lacan's symbolic – to

10. 1987 September 23rd, Margaret Thatcher, Interview for *Woman's Own*. Accessed on the 5th of November 2018 from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>

“envelop the life of [the yet to be born baby] with a network so total that [...] they bring to his birth [...] the shape of his destiny” (Lacan, 1953: 231E379). Thus, Ettinger’s matrix, conceptualized as an alternative to subjectivity and desire formation, allows to put again the emphasis on the need of a plurality rather than a restricting imposition of individuality posed by neoliberalism. Neoliberal dictums of competition, perfectibility and consumption exacerbate in a pejorative fashion alienation typical of Lacanian subjectivity. Contrarily, Ettinger’s matrix with its *metramorphic* ability of co-becoming traces an alternative path for the subject to desire.

What then can be learnt from Lacanian psychoanalysis while thinking critically about the subject’s desire in the era of neoliberalism? Desire in the neoliberal era comes to constitute itself in a demand-like fashion. The subject is relentlessly demanded to desire to regain its ‘true’ perfect(able) self. Lacan’s ideas concerning the omnipresent invisible quality in the University discourse of a master, of a ‘neutral’ knowledge which supports it, have been critically reviewed. Furthermore, the dangers of a perpetual offer for objects aimed to perfect subjects have been highlighted by reflecting on Lacanian notions of lack, alienation, *object a* and desire. Particularly, Haynes’ [SAFE] has been employed as a reference and guiding point not only to critically reflect on these issues, but further to think of ways to resist and go beyond neoliberal impositions of consumerism and perfectibility. Even though Carol’s story does not entail a happy ending, it nevertheless highlights the limitations of a model of subjectivity based predominantly on the individual. The perm scene, in which blood appears on Carol’s perfect face reflected in the mirror, enables to introduce a critical feminine lens to re-read the whole movie and Lacan’s theory of subjectivity. The subject in both Lacan’s theory and in neoliberalism desires the possession of *things*. In Ettinger’s matrix and Haynes’ Carol desire is for connection. Lacanian psychoanalysis and particularly Ettinger’s reading of Lacan teach us that in the neoliberal era desire now more than ever should be not for commodities, but for communion.

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