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Proudhon, Lacan, and the Quilting Points

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 Jesse Cohn (Intro., Trans.)**

Introduction: A Proudhonian Perspective

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a key source of inspiration for Daniel Colson's post-anarchist philosophy, is scarcely remembered at all by Anglo-American readers of theory. When he is remembered, it is generally as the whipping boy for Marx, who dedicated an entire book, *The Poverty of Philosophy* ([1847] 1995), to trashing Proudhon's *Philosophy of Poverty* ([1846] 2011). Caricatured there as a petit-bourgeois moralist dabbling in a Hegelianism he scarcely understands, Proudhon has languished in obscurity ever since, the majority of his works remaining untranslated into English. His reputation – perversely, for someone who famously answered the question “What is property?” with the resounding declaration that “Property is theft!” – is that of a kind of fetishist of the independent small proprietor, a devotee of the untrammelled “liberty” of “the individual.” As if this weren't enough, he suffers from the charge leveled at all of the so-called “classical anarchists”: pinning his social hopes on a spurious “human nature” that is ostensibly rational, good, gregarious, etc. (see, for example, Koch, 1993). In short, Proudhon appears to us as a musty curiosity from the cabinet of gaudy nineteenth-century utopian doctrines – anything but relevant to a postmodern era.

What Daniel Colson has revealed, in his re-readings of Proudhon, is something entirely different. Contrary to what has been asserted, Proudhon in fact launches a pluralistic assault on all the utopias that aim to reduce human diversity to a single normative image, an inevitably despotic “absolute” (Proudhon [1858] 1935, 3.172). Colson's Proudhon is not a moralist in the sense indicted by Marx or Nietzsche, believing in a self-contained subject who freely subjects himself to a Law that precedes and governs life; he is a kind of pragmatist for whom knowledge is never to be seen as separate from power, for whom signification and force are the two irreducible faces of a single reality. His ethics consist of a continual attempt to negotiate relations of power within the networks of association that constitute not a Rousseauvian “social contract” among independent persons but “collective beings” increasingly capable of expressing all the powers and possibilities they contain.

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Rather than erecting utopian sandcastles on *a priori*, essentialist foundations, Proudhon is an ontologist of “resultants”: all the faculties of what is called “Man” are, like everything else in the universe, “the resultant of a compound of other powers, themselves resulting from other compositions, other forces, etc.” (Colson, 2001: 273-4). Every time forces join, the “resultant” is not, as Thomas Hobbes would have it, a mathematical sum, but something qualitatively different, a “collective force” which is both “the expression of the forces and powers which, in composing it, make it possible” and “at the same time more and other, distinct from the forces which render them possible [...] a radically new, autonomous reality” (Colson, 2007: 97-8). In short, the Proudhon who emerges from Colson’s interpretation stands in a relation of profoundly mutual illumination with the poststructuralism of Gilles Deleuze.

In this light, it is intriguing to ask what kinds of association Proudhon might enter into with Jacques Lacan. On the one hand, as a Deleuzian, Colson is fiercely opposed to Lacan’s psychoanalytic pretensions, and especially to the concept of desire as presupposing lack – a lack that quickly becomes a new (and dismal) foundation for social relations:

The identification of desire with lack, absence, and deprivation, from Christianity to psychoanalysis, has played an essential role in the subjection of beings to an oppressive order that has become distorted in its power. In place of a conception based on the negative, in which desire, inevitably placed under the sign of *ressentiment*, exists only through the absence of its object, through a castration in which every force is separated from its own capacities, libertarian thought substitutes an identification of desire with power, plenitude, superabundance, and generosity. [...] Whereas, in the theory of desire as lack, the encounter with the other becomes impossible, the libertarian conception of desire and its power continuously make possible an encounter with the totality of other collective forces, on a certain plane of reality, since these forces are also subjective beings, each of which one potentially contains within oneself [...] Every encounter and every difference, however little they avoid the traps (dialectical or otherwise) that external collisions and confrontations never fail to cause, may then serve as the occasion for each to reveal the infinite power that it contains, the occasion for it to exceed its own limits and to do all that it is capable of (Colson, 2005: 180-1; see also Robinson, 2005).

It is for this reason that Colson’s fellow Deleuzian, Todd May, has also concluded that Lacanian theory provides “a weak basis for political thought and organizing,” as it “tends to drive people apart rather than bringing them together” (2002: 11).

It is perhaps fitting, then, that Colson takes as his point of departure for an exploration of the relationship between Proudhon and Lacan the notion of the

“quilting point” or *point de capiton*, this mysterious locus in which incommensurable things are made to converge. Are we watching a rapprochement between philosophical enemies? Or, on the contrary, is Colson practicing that very Deleuzian mode of critique-by-satire, the “buggery” that consists of “taking an author from *behind*, and giving him a *child* that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous” (1995: 6)?

It may be argued that the offspring in question (and, indeed, Deleuze’s masculinist metaphor) is illegitimate. Other post-anarchist readings of Lacan, notably Saul Newman’s, have construed him as anything but “a structuralist of strict observance,” as Colson would have it here. It is possible to emphasize instead the degree to which Lacan departed from structuralism, producing an image of the subject that is discontinuous, unstable, fluctuating, and so on. Nonetheless, Colson draws on rather orthodox primary and secondary sources, and his treatment of Lacan’s conception of time – a conception he sees as deeply indebted to the structuralist legacy – is not far from some other contemporary readings, such as Adrian Johnston’s, which draw on some of the same passages in Lacan’s *Seminars* (See Johnston, 2005: 46-7).

Ironically, Proudhon happens to be one of the only anarchist authors in whom Lacan ever expressed an interest. “I highly recommend you read Proudhon,” he remarks in one of his *Seminars*: “he had a solid mind [...] Proudhon, whose every thought runs counter to romantic illusions” (Lacan, 1978: 260). Elsewhere, he puckishly appropriates Proudhon’s admonition that “property is theft” (Lacan, 1997: 82). Is it unthinkable that Lacan could be made to bear the impossible offspring of this impossible man?

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Among the many contradictions that Proudhon refuses to resolve, that he considers essential to life, is one that touches on his own existence.

—On the one hand, repeated endlessly, we find an ontology of becomings and transformations, in which every individual, like everything else, is a “group,” necessarily provisional and often evanescent, in a constant state of metamorphosis, a “composite of powers” and “spontaneities,” at once a “resultant” and a “component” of a multitude of other entities likewise composed and individuated; actual and virtual entities, included within one another and doubly infinite in number, from the largest to the smallest.

—On the other hand, there is the obstinacy and stubborn self-assertion of the individual named Proudhon, refusing any compromise, any loss or weakening of himself, whether in the indeterminacy of his attitudes or in unspoken, vague, and tentative reconciliations. The individual Proudhon always aims at an absolute mastery of his life, often at the real risk of placing himself in opposition to everyone, of isolating himself and, above all, of endlessly expounding on all subjects, multiplying texts and speeches, seeking to voice, to understand, and to encompass the world, to grasp everything, again from the largest subjects to the smallest and most immediate: socialism, property, federalism, revolution, art, war, peace, order in humanity, anarchy, but also taxes, stock exchange speculation, the railroads, the benefits of chastity, advice to princes and industrialists, the “perpetual exposition,” woman’s sexual weakness, or personal reflections *ad infinitum* on the reasons for accepting or refusing a duel, marrying or not marrying, etc. Minor or major, written for personal reasons or on request, public or intimate, the topics covered by Proudhon never fail to give rise to endless treatises in which Proudhon the individual tries to say everything and consider everything, without leaving anything out, at the risk of ruining his health and ending up dying at the age of fifty-six. He leaves behind the mass of some incredible twenty thousand printed pages of texts and treaties, stacked, composite, in all their diversity, their eclecticism, their relentless repetition of the different and the variation of their perspectives. In their very heterogeneity, they are homologous to the anarchy of beings that Proudhon the individual is always attempting to think through the various experiences of the libertarian movement once again, through a new object, a new problem, a new pretext, a new perspective, but each time with as much conviction, or, more precisely, “resolution” – an important concept for understanding Proudhon, but also, as we shall see later, for understanding how the improbable Jacques Lacan comes, in his turn, to cross paths with anarchism:

What is it, indeed, that we call a person? And what does this person mean when he says: *Me*? – is it his arm, his head, his body, or his passion, his intelligence, his talent, his memory, his virtue, his conscience? Is it any of his faculties? Is it even the series or synthesis of his faculties, physical and mental? It is all of this, to begin with [...], and more than this. It is his intimate, invisible essence, which conceives itself as a superior existence, sovereign in its liberty, dominating its faculties from on high, disposing of them arbitrarily; [...] in short, an absolute, and an absolute that is not only posited, but an absolute that feels, sees, wants, acts, and speaks (Proudhon, [1858] 1935: 3.172-3).

At once a resultant and an absolute affirmation (“*sui generis*”), each individual is a radically new and autonomous reality which nonetheless depends entirely on the forces that compose it. For Proudhon cannot get around this double statement, an intentional antinomy: the total autonomy of beings and their just as total dependence on the forces that give them a soul and a body (for a time) during brief equilibriums that never stop transforming them and allowing them to say, each from its own side, once more, in a different voice every time: “me,” “I want,” “I do,” “I feel,” “I think.”

—Hence the succession, in Proudhon, of so-called “stances,” with their profound discursive effects, like swollen rivers that swell and overflow of their own accord, and with no shortage of metamorphoses over the course of so many pages, dividing into small rivers and streams, which are themselves, behind the unitary appearance of their turbulent becoming, composed from a multitude of other beings, other forces in a state of becoming, disparate, contradictory, constantly colliding with one another in their swirling evanescence, all aspiring to constitute stances in their turn, wanting to impose their “yoke” upon everything, as Gabriel Tarde says (1999: 57; 2011: 27).

—But this is also the source of Proudhon’s anguish, at every moment, in the face of “decisions,” from the most ordinary to those taken in the heat of the most terrible events of 1848, for example, when Proudhon once again decided to radically alter his views on the world and the revolution, all the while giving expression to the anguish of this transformation, to the best of his ability, through a new text – a retrospective look at an interval in which, even as we change, we never cease to be the same:

A republican of the college, the workshop, the office, I shivered in terror at what I saw approaching the Republic [...] the social revolution had arisen without anyone, neither from above nor below, seeming to

have the intelligence of it. Now what would the revolution do, what would it become, without anyone possessing its secret, its idea! [...] The Revolution, Republic, Socialism, overlapping one another, coming fast! [...] This revolution that was going to burst upon the public order was the zero hour of a social revolution for which nobody had the word. [...]. Thus, everything seemed to me to be alarming, amazing, paradoxical [...] In this devouring anxiety, I rebelled against the drift of events, I dared to condemn destiny. [...] My soul was in agony [...]. On February 21st, in the evening, I still exhorted my friends not to fight. On the 22nd, I breathed when I heard of the opposition backing down; I believed myself at the end of my martyrdom. Then the day of the 23rd came to dissipate my illusions. But this time the die was cast, *jacta est alea*, as M. de Lamartine says. The shooting in the Rue des Capucines changed my dispositions in an instant. I was no longer the same man (Proudhon, 1983: 75).

“I was no longer the same man,” writes Proudhon, which means that after a period of anxiety in which he had been lost, Proudhon, in “chang[ing] [his] dispositions,” returns to himself in a kind of swooning, becoming the individual Proudhon all over again, the same person and yet another person, still *determined* to see clearly, to grasp everything and understand everything, to write new treatises from new perspectives. This necessary (and intimate) antinomy between the same and the different, between absolute freedom and a no less absolute necessity that gives it its strength and its “resolution” – (“I had to do it!” “I couldn’t have done otherwise!”) – is not unique to the life and thought of Proudhon. We find it in Déjacque, Coeuderoy, or Bakunin, but also in most of the collective experiences of working-class anarchism. It is found for example in Brazil where, as Jacy de Seixas Alves shows us, the different labor movements of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, can, like Proudhon fifty years earlier, display an “insistent and disconcerting unity” even if they are almost unbelievably discontinuous and heterogeneous in their acronyms and organizations, journals, projects, and political and philosophical references, in the nature of the working-class forces they set in motion.⁵⁹ It is also found in the “unparalleled plasticity” of direct action described by Pouget, one of the leaders of the French CGT before 1914, direct action having “no specific form” but rather an excess of possible forms, an excess that thus imparts all the power of that which exists to every act, every assertion, every situation, every individual crystallization (Pouget, 2003: 23, 13).

⁵⁹ On this contrast between unity and disparity, see Seixas (1989).

How to think this extreme tension between the “determinate” and an excessive indeterminacy that gives it its strength and intensity, where the “determinate” and “determination” change meaning, and – due to objective but merely apparent and illusory external constraints – become internal needs? How to think the relationship between the “resolute,” this tension between will and “resolution,” this way the real anarchy is bound and loosed in constant singular beings acting and thinking, the objective nature obvious even they derive their strength and existence of themselves and their subjective power?⁶⁰ From Leibniz’s “monads” and the Simondonian account of “individuation,” Spinoza’s “modes,” Nietzsche’s “will to power,” and Proudhon’s “collective beings” to Whitehead’s “prehensions,” “concrecences,” and other “actual entities,” we have (also) a great number of concepts with which to address these questions, not in the manner of a multitude of doors opening indifferently, so that “too many taxes kill taxes,” as the imbeciles say,⁶¹ but rather to think and then complicate the infinite – in the manner of Proudhon’s work, or of children who shout “more!” – starting from the repetition of another infinity of experiences, perceptions, and points of view. The anarchy of that which exists, this “much stranger unity that applies only to the multiple” referred to by Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari, [1980] 2004: 175), is of course matched by an overabundance of concepts and thus of possible points of view, ways of adapting to [*plier*] and understanding [*appréhender*] the world, from the best known to the most improbable – the Lacanian concept of the “quilting point,” for example.

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As we know, quilting points are the attachments stitching a surface, such as leather, to the fabric of the upholstery, e.g., on an English armchair or on the old-fashioned doors of a notary’s office. Lacan’s (original) use of this concept is very interesting in terms of its effects, but we must recognize that it first takes shape in questions as far removed from any anarchist perspective as [Ferdinand de] Saussure’s theory of language, in particular the distinction between signifier and signified. As we all know, in Saussurean thought, the signifier is the material and objective aspect of language, with its phonemes, words, and phrases, its internal structure that allows us to distinguish and thus to form signs, while the signified is the idea or concept that these words and phrases are supposed to say and express. The problem for Lacan is: how are the signifier and signified connected to one another? How can the signifier and signified form blocs of meaning, beings, or entities that make sense? And how does

⁶⁰ “I am resolved,” “we are resolved,” to what? Sometimes we do not know. We are resolute in “something,” resolved to “do something,” without knowing why but without losing any of the strength and intensity of a “resolution” that stands as itself, in the words, in 1921, in the texts of “revolutionary syndicalist committees” of the French CGT (see Colson, 1986: 104), but thus mobilizing considerable forces, struggling body and effects all the more unpredictable: it is first a “resolution” with no strings attached or definite object.

⁶¹ In French, “trop d’impôt tue l’impôt,” a neoliberal economic slogan. Here, the sense of the phrase is to stand for the assumption of a self-annihilating plurality, a kind of marketplace in which all the differences cancel one another out. [Translator’s note.]

this take place below the level of the mechanical logorrhea that comprises everyday speech or the constant flow of ideas (or moods) that assail us, passing from one into another, merging, transforming, diverging, etc.?⁶² The problem for Lacan, but also for all of the structuralists, is knitted into a thesis. For Lacan, the signifier and signified are barred from one another (see Figures 1 and 2). Incommensurable, like Heaven and Earth in the old monotheisms (Figure 3), they tend to operate independently of one another and on their own accounts, with the signifiers on top, structured by language and its erratic effects, thinking for us, guiding our actions and our wills. On the bottom, or below, we find confused and constantly changing states of consciousness, as in dreams.

This disproportion between the hierarchy of top and bottom, between Heaven and Earth (we leave here the interesting question of Hell), but also between thought and extension, the symbolic and the real, etc., is nothing very new. Historically, it has given rise to a variety of solutions. For example, monotheism, with its single temple and divine revelation, spatially and historically situated (the *high places* of the Bible), in opposition to the proliferation of polytheist and animist meeting points, attempts to impose a monopoly of communication in the form of the temple of Jerusalem, Rome, or Mecca, and especially the single Book (see Figures 4 and 5). Or more recently, on the terrain of philosophy alone, where Descartes situates the point of intersection (between thought and extension) in the philosophico-anatomical *high place* that is the pineal gland (Figure 6).⁶²

The apparently more limited question Lacan poses is therefore constructed within an old problem which he formulates in modern terms, as follows: how can the flow of signifiers, the sequence of words and phrases, be knitted onto the flow of signifieds (ideas or “states of consciousness,” for example)? How can quilting points be formed, these “high places” where Earth and Heaven, but also signifier and signified, or the symbolic and the real, are knit together and take shape, not in Mecca or in the temple in Jerusalem but in those other chapels that are psychoanalysts’ offices? How can high and low bend, curve towards one another and form nodes [*nœuds*] of meaning? Here, Lacan lets us make three points of particular interest for libertarian thought.

1 — The first point, actually quite comforting: it is true that the way the signifier and the signified always tend to slide over one another, hanging together with real difficulty, has something of the exceptional and problematic if not impossible character of the encounter between Heaven and Earth. We can observe, however, that this lack of attachment is especially noticeable and evident in psychoanalytic treatment, in particular the couch itself, the story of dreams, verbal associations, etc. In real life, the signifiers uttered and the states of consciousness signified may well brush up against one another. They are mostly found within practical situations that always force them to be knitted to one another, to acquire meaning

⁶² One could also place Lacan’s “Borromean knot” here.

and substance within these situations.⁶³ Let us take an example. If, while driving, someone said: “look at that big *babut* [truck] on the right!” We understand as soon as the *babut* in question has nothing to do with the *babut* [sideboard] where our grandmother arranged the jams that we stole when we were little, before we went to a boarding school where there was no jam, then had recurrent distressing dreams in which the *babut* [sideboard] turns into a *dabut* [goat-monster] and an exhausting chase, etc. Ordinary life, the most commonplace, therefore, determines the moments and meanings, and thus knits together signifiers and signifieds, not in the manner of the sociologist who could identify their frameworks or grammars of action, but through a tangle of particular situations, issues, stances, sketches, statements that are more or less implicit and chaotic, even in the moments that are seemingly the most structured and repetitive, as when the priest, saying, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost” seeks to knit the signifier and signified together in a clear and unambiguous way. And it is here, from an anarchist perspective, that Lacan’s analysis is suddenly of great interest. In this analysis, psychoanalysis and everyday life tend to present the two extremes of how signifiers and signifieds come to be knitted together. On the one hand, there are the prophecies of the couch where signifiers and signifieds slide freely over one another, with only a few sporadic attachments where Lacan apprehends what he calls the “quilting point” (the moment when he charged for the consultation). On the other hand, we find those ordinary situations in which it is rather the anarchic excess of attachments between signifiers and signifieds, the infinite number of concomitant, potential, or possible knots [*nœuds*] which, by their excessiveness, make the knots [*nœuds*] of the quilting points problematic. If the meaning and the actual deployment of entities pose a real problem, it is twofold or in the direction of two extremes: lack and scarcity in the one case, oversupply and excess in the other, in those ordinary situations where, as Bergson says about the pragmatism of William James, there is always “too much of this, too much of that, too much of everything” – too many notes, as Salieri said of Mozart’s music, too many waves and drops of water making their singular voices heard, which thus seem to prevent us from hearing the sound of the sea (see Figures 7 and 8) (Bergson, [1934] 2002: 267-8). In short, psychoanalytic treatment, in the rarified atmosphere of its laboratory, reveals what is masked, paradoxically, by the chaotic abundance of real life: namely, the problematic nature of beings, of their freedom and their association, and through this, the no less problematic relationship between signifiers and signifieds, where they are knitted together in the form of the quilting points.

2 — But as an exception to the rule (by virtue of its rarity), analytic treatment provides a second indication of how to grasp the anarchy of the real and how it knits together signifier and signified. Theoretically, the

⁶³ In spite of all the misunderstandings and mistaken identities that comprise the charm and the bother of daily life.

Lacanian quilting point is a game of language, that language which operates in psychoanalytic treatment. Without going into details one can say that the quilting point is related to the sentence, the fact that the sentences form an entity in which the ending, the poorly named *dénouement*, is (first) to knit [*nouer*] the words preceding this conclusion, giving them a sense of unity, in retrospect, one might say, as when we reach the end of a movie or a thriller, when Hercule Poirot, usually in a crowded room and in the presence of all the protagonists, “tidies up” the confusion of events and gives the characters (and readers) their meaning and thus the real dramatic unity of the up until now disparate elements of the story that you have just read, the “key to the mystery,” the “last word,” as they say.⁶⁴ We will return to the importance (from an anarchist point of view) of the times and becomings that accompany history and stories, but for now we can see how, in the analytical situation, the quilting point, this conclusion that gives meaning, in retrospect, is not only a game of language. Through the utterance of the patient, it involves something else, two essential realities: *desire* and the *subject*, or to put it in anarchist or Proudhonian terms, *force* and *subjectivity*, the *real* and *individuation* thought as subjectivity, as a point of subjectivation. This aspect of Lacan’s analysis is very interesting because in its particular place, it reveals (perhaps) not only the *subjective* (and phantasmic) dimension of lived experiences in ordinary situations, but the very nature of these situations, which it is no longer appropriate to think in the constraining form of external and objective *frameworks*, homologous to the science that claims to seize them, but as pure events and through subjective experience and where managers do experience that one where external determinism turns into inner determination, where the (logical) “resolution” of a problem declares the intensity of an entirely internal “resolution” or “will.” Thanks to the Lacanian model, the desert of the cure is peopled with the superabundance and thus the anarchy of the events of ordinary life, a multitude of quilting points, wild in a sense, but all functioning, even in the chaos of their diversity, on the model of the rare and precious associative and subjective closures of analytic treatment. Consequently, any entity existing at a given time, and there are many – whether human or not human, social, physical, linguistic, spiritual or land-based, pervasive or only potential long-term or fleeting, microscopic or at the scale of the entire world – can be traced back to desires or forces, to subjects or singular subjectivities. This hypothesis may seem strange, in view of the narrow horizons of psychoanalysis, but it is at the very heart of Proudhon’s thought or Tarde’s, for example, and of course that of many other thinkers: Spinoza, Whitehead, Benjamin, Deleuze, Foucault, and so on. In short, one could say that the Lacanian quilting point contributes to voicing that reality and its anarchic abundance, the unceasing agitation of an infinite number of evanescent and ephemeral beings, but with all the equally infinite force and desire that then maintain their existence, an anarchic and thoroughly subjective reality that defies any illusion of objectivity – e.g., the objectivity

⁶⁴ Which thus *stitches* everything up [*noue*] even as it *unravels* the mystery [*dénoue*].

of science, a quilting point like any other, only slightly more pretentious than the others, a quilting point that does not know itself as such, that is likewise unconscious of the imperialist character of its *will to know*, of its own desire.⁶⁵

3 — Lacan makes a third and final remark about the quilting point, something that also concerns libertarian thought and the exact point where Lacanian theory and its structuralist background, however, seem most remote from anarchism: the question of time, duration and history. In libertarian thought, the real (that which is) consists of an infinite number of subjective, fleeting and discontinuous entities in a constant state of transformation; the duration and becoming, the histories and stories of these entities, their births and deaths, their encounters and their transformations, are therefore an essential part of anarchist ontology. For anarchism, everything is history [*histoire*] (in the sense that one *tells stories* [*fait des histoires*]); everything is duration and becoming, an infinite and anarchic multitude of durations and becomings.

By contrast, Lacan, as a structuralist of strict observance, tends to radically reject duration and time in his consideration of the human psyche and, more generally, of the symbolic which is supposed to serve as the matrix and framework for the human world. On the terrain of sociology and history, we find Althusser in this position, for example, in his haughty and lasting denunciation of historicism and empiricism. For structuralism, human realities can only be taken into account in a synchronic, timeless manner. Obviously, Lacan is not unaware that duration, becoming, and time exist, if only via the blood and fluids of birth, sex, and death. But this duration, this becoming, and this time exist only on the side of things, and thus on the side of the signifieds and their flux, largely inaccessible (and, for Lacan, terrifying). It is found on the side of reality, but reality is barred to humans. Human beings are condemned to perceive the world and thus themselves only through the paltry dimension of the symbolic, with its radically synchronic and repetitive character.⁶⁶ The signifying chain which, on the terrain of the symbolic, orders mental life and human interaction, does have its own temporality. But that time is radically different from the duration and becoming of things. Lacan defines the temporality of the symbolic and thus the signifier in a particularly illuminating way. He calls it “*logical time*.” The concept of logical time (of the repetition of the same) is in no way specifically Lacanian. It lies at the heart of the presuppositions of science and thus at the heart of the human sciences when they claim to be

⁶⁵ On the particularly deadly nature of this desire or will, in addition to Foucault, see Georges Bernanos, especially the character of “monsieur Ouine” (2000) or even Saint-Marin and the parish priest of Luzarnes in *Under Satan's Sun* (2001).

⁶⁶ On Lacan's inability (or refusal), unlike Althusser, to recognize in the “real” a “function” that is not “negative,” belonging to “an impossible or a traumatic event that is unrepresentable” see Balibar (2014: xvii). On the problematic nature of Lacan's relations to the physical realities of birth and death, see Marini [1986] (1992).

scientific. It is found for example in Durkheimian positivism, or in the approaches in terms of *frames of experience* (or the *grammars* of a certain pragmatism) in which, as Lacan says, we find “the battery of signifiers [...] [that] are already there” (Lacan, 2006: 13). As Lacan says: “one’s bearings are already laid down, the signifying reference-points of the problem are already marked in it and the solution will never go beyond them” (Lacan, 1998: 40). Logical time is also found in historiography, not only or even primarily in the structuralist historiography of the *Annales* school, but in the more traditional chronological historiography, that storytelling [*histoire*] so improperly called the *history of events* [*histoire événementielle*], a history based on the logical chain of causes and effects, in which chronology, determinism, and narrative form such a solid *ménage (à trois)*. So, in summary, we can say that for Lacan, the logical time of the signifying chain, as the basis of representations and human actions, does not open onto the duration of things. This access to it is barred, except at precisely one site: the quilting point. And it is there that everything changes.

We can summarize Lacan’s thesis or intuition as follows: the quilting point reinjects the duration of things into logical time (thus, that of the physicists, the historians, and the sociologists). Lacan explains how the quilting point, because it is the place of desire and human subjectivity, has a “diachronic function” (Lacan, 2002: 292) The quilting point corresponds to “a movement of the subject that opens up only to close again in a certain temporal *pulsation*” (Lacan, 1998: 125; my emphasis). But Lacan goes further. He added: “[this] *pulsation* I regard as being more radical than the insertion in the signifier that no doubt motivates it, but is not primary to it at the level of essence” (Lacan, 1975: 274). For Lacan, what is taking place thus has something to do with desire and subjectivity, but also with things and their duration. Reintroduced into the heart of human existence, i.e., into its subjectivity, its lived reality, and its desire, the duration of things is prior to any signifier. Human subjectivity still ultimately depends on the signifier and on logical time, but very weakly and not without contradiction, since Lacan reduces this dependence to a simple and vague “motivation” preceded by a skeptical (and rather pregnant) “probably” (Lacan, 1998: 128).

Let us recall what we have observed so far. The quilting point as a place of subjectivity and desire, caught up in the duration of things, appears within the analytic cure. It even constitutes an essential moment in this process, albeit a rare moment. The relationship between signifier and signified is not as barred as Lacan would like to think. Let us recognize its rarity – but with a new reservation that changes everything. The quilting point is rare, but only in the particular situation of the analytic cure, or in dreams. In reality, however, it is extremely common (too common, actually). It is singular each time, albeit in the sense of Benjamin’s remark that *the exception is the rule* (Benjamin, 1986: 3, 433; 1986: 257). The quilting point and subjectivity, desire and the time that attach to them, are always exceptional, odd things, but as an infinite number of exceptions, they become the (admittedly chaotic) rule of human existence, as of everything.

Through the image of the quilting points (drawn from the domain of handicraft), Lacan helps us to grasp the way in which Proudhon theorizes the anarchy of beings. Lacan also allows us to see how this anarchy is in no way incompatible with Proudhon's Franche-Comtois character – an obstinacy and stubbornness demonstrated, to varying degrees, by all possible beings. As a “focal point where all the relations of things are reflected and combined,” “like the plant and the crystal, but to a greater degree than these” (Proudhon, [1858] 1935: 3, 162; [1853] 1946: 64), the individual, whether resolved or irresolute, is both an event and a quilting point, a high place, able to knit together and bring into focus not only heaven and earth, the signifier and the signified, or even the hierarchy of the two Cartesian substances, but an infinite number of planes, perspectives, and *raison d'être* that deprive it of any essential identity in their constant transformation, and at the same time, help explain its astonishing capacity to persist in being.

Figures

Figure 1:

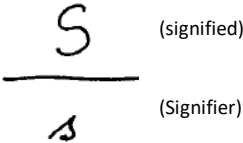


Figure 2:

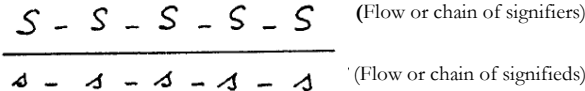


Figure 3:

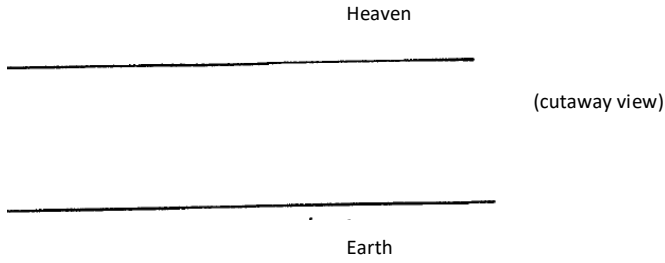


Figure 4:

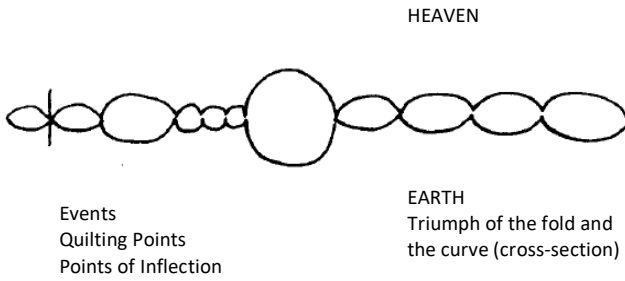


Figure 5:

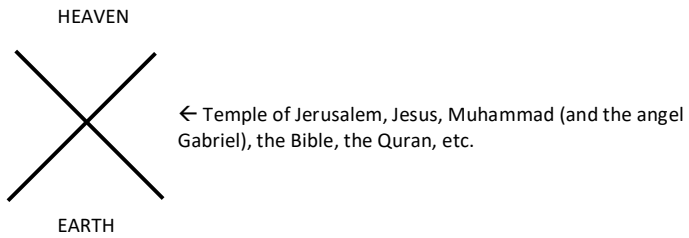


Figure 6:

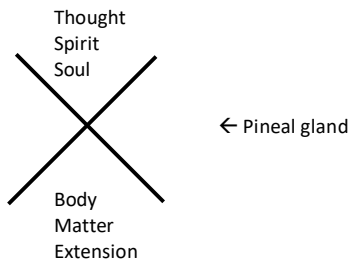
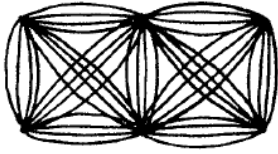


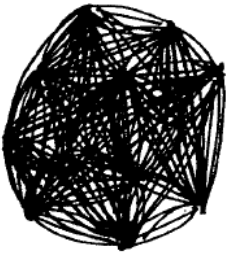
Figure 7:



Mechanical quilting points, organized by the frameworks of experience (seen from above).

Partial, but exhaustive in their repetition of the same.

Figure 8:



Anarchic (and real) quilting points (again, seen from above). A mere selection of the surface, from a certain angle, from any point in the universe.

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