

The Anxiety of #MeToo: A Response to Jean-Claude Milner

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It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her account in her emotional life.

— Simone de Beauvoir¹

There is no denying the impact of #MeToo and the debate it has ignited. Insofar as online media can be a site of activism, #MeToo is one of the most successful campaigns to raise awareness of gendered oppression. Not only has it inspired many to confront the actuality of sexual harassment, coercion and misconduct towards women, but also to theorize what #MeToo should be purporting. Of particular interest here is the way in which #MeToo, when it confronts the sexual act, puts pleasure and desire under the microscope. With regard to female pleasure, it is sometimes perplexing how certain readings — especially by men — suppose that it is something that is wholly knowable.

One such reading is Jean-Claude Milner's article from 2019 on the #MeToo movement, "Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy."² Milner not only misreads (and arguably overlooks) the movement by short circuiting questions of sexuation and *jouissance*, but he also fails to address the underpinning presumption of many commentaries arising from #MeToo: that the sexual non-relation applies in particular to women who articulate the words, "#MeToo" rather than — as is the case — to everyone. Furthermore, the lack #MeToo speaks to becomes ideologically obfuscated when ignoring gender/sex relations as unconsciously playing out in the mediated Symbolic. Thus Milner's position is problematic because #MeToo is not only a political-feminist provocation but also raises important

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Random House, 1949), 39.

² Jean-Claude Milner, "Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy," *Problemi International* 3 (2019), 65-89.

questions of psychoanalysis. In short, Milner presents female pleasure (and unpleasure) as an object of knowledge to be attained by the Other rather than an object lying beyond discourse that exceeds knowledge. Milner's position presupposes the Other as invested in attaining such knowledge but ignores the Other's lack in being itself woven into non-rapport. For him, "Me Too conceives of a link of ordinary coitus to rape",³ a claim liable to feverish exaggeration, ultimately positing that "men have no rights in the domain of sexual relations."⁴ For Milner, those women who declare #MeToo are misled, duped and at odds with a Lacanian approach due to the movement's "equation *human being* = *human body*."⁵ Here, we disagree. Rather, we propose that #MeToo engages with what Milner absolutely ignores: first, it struggles with the symptom as it emerges under patriarchal conditions; and second, it reinstates the question of jouissance as a transferential encounter in which Phallic jouissance shows itself unequipped to 'answer' the question: *what does a woman want?*

Before further addressing Milner's position, let us recall the experience of Freud's Dora as a psychoanalytic forerunner of #MeToo. The narrative of Dora attests that there is nothing new about sexual harassment; it has always been with us. Dora might have flirted with Herr K; she might have even been flattered and tempted to take up his offer of a sexual tryst. We know for certain, however, that Dora's frustration with Herr K was amplified when her father and Freud did not support her refusal to become Herr K's mistress, even pressuring her to consider his proposition a compliment, her desired enjoyment. Freud even pathologized Dora's refusal, which led her to put an end to her analysis. It is quite likely that Dora would have written #MeToo on her Facebook or Twitter page!

What then does Milner argue? He correctly notes that #MeToo is more than just a response to Hollywood sex scandals, that it "concerns the general representation of sexual relations."⁶ Although he accepts that #MeToo tells us something about the sexual relation, he never really explores this, apart from a rather swift alignment of sex with capitalistic modes of exchange. He ignores how the sexual relation works in terms of

³ Ibid, 78.

⁴ Ibid, 79.

⁵ Ibid, 81.

⁶ Ibid, 65.

lack of relation in the Real, and of jouissance. What Milner *does* say about sex (which he often refers to simply as ‘coitus’) reduces nonrapport to bodily encounters (following his presumption of ‘body = being’); he also mistakenly implies that women simply do not desire seduction and that therefore every attempt to seduce has the potential of misinterpretation and probable catastrophe (in Milner’s hyperbolic prediction, this potentially manifests in enforced BDSM at best, and compulsory IVF at worst).⁷ This is, of course, highly problematic as far as women are concerned; and it supposes, relying on an discomfiting caricature, that men (if we are to take Lacan at his word regarding the function of phallic jouissance) are only successful as Don Juans,⁸ which is how Herr K thought of himself, seducing one woman after another. Embracing the Other in this way, on the face of it, implies the romantic idea that man not only knows (or is supposed to know) the jouissance of woman, but also that, in acting upon this knowledge, he provides a meeting point for a man and a woman to share mutual sexual jouissance. Also revealed here, however, is the *fantasy* of such jouissance in an encounter that places both parties at risk, because the place of the Other is never foreseeable or comfortable. Feminist thought provides abundant evidence that those who enjoy offering themselves as the Other of woman’s jouissance tend to fail miserably, often comically so. Lacan underscores this point in *Seminar XX* when he asks: “What does the most recent development in topology allow us to say about this place of the Other, of a sex as Other, as absolute Other?”⁹ His conclusion is that sex is essentially a nonrelation, a

⁷ He goes on to ask, “Does that mean that coitus should be prohibited or considered at least as an extreme sexual practice, analogous, for example, to bondage?”, and then continues, “Procreation without coitus should prevail, since the new developments of scientific research have made it possible. In vitro fertilization could become the preferential method to be adopted by politically minded couples. *It could even be made obligatory*”, 82. [Emphasis added].

⁸ That is, the man whose conquests are countable, knowable and objectifiable. Here Milner reads the #MeToo hashtag as problematic because it troubles the definitive countability requisite to *make the man*. He further expresses that #MeToo is composed of counting which he calls an “indefinite addition,” 65. While we think that this is a mis-reading of the #hashtag (that is, simply *anybody* can be a #Me or a #NotMe), Milner’s uptake of the hashtag also demonstrates a preoccupation and presumption with the sexual relation as in the end, quantifiable. Surely, even if a comical take (and an unfunny one at that), to presume that this would be the plea of the #MeToo movement is a serious misreading of the effects of misogyny.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality and the Limits of Love and Knowledge (Encore)*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 9. Absolute Otherness is a radical

sort of impasse. Joan Copjec takes this further, in “Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason,” when she describes sex as something we continuously trip over, because we are compelled mistakenly to keep thinking that the sexual rapport can be attained and harnessed.¹⁰ At the same time, when it becomes apparent that man does *not* know woman’s jouissance (but like Don Juan and Herr K merely purports to), an important contradiction emerges from the way in which the subject writes out this nonrelation, revealing, as it does, the ultimate impasse: that the big Other does not exist. The effect of this contradiction is anguish, trauma and anxiety carried by woman – which is, precisely, the psychoanalytic problem to which #MeToo alerts us. The problems here are: the missing of the mark of transmission and of jouissance; the inability to read desire and; the confrontation with an Other not courageous enough to admit its lack of interest or insight.

Milner suggests that #MeToo is quite obviously a signifier – in the sense that it is an indeterminate addition to a signifying chain – which, as Lacan states, represents “a subject for another signifier.”¹¹ For Milner, it is evident that #MeToo refers to ‘coitus’ (“the movement has publicly and extensively raised the question of coitus”¹²), whereby it signifies the impossibility of the sexual relation. It would be a partially correct reading of #MeToo to suppose that it signifies the jouissance of the relation which *cannot be written*, that it means, within a not entirely wanted or shared encounter, that a mark has been missed, never to be recaptured in a *re-mark*. What Milner suggests, however, is that there is a bodily logic of the signifier; that one speaks the signifier followed by another, as a repeated structure. But Milner himself misses the mark when he reduces this signification not to trauma but to an asymmetrical relation of Symbolic violence at the level

alterity of sorts, a mistaken identity we might even say, a way in which access is denied. This is not (as we have mentioned in the previous footnote) as Milner would have it, a case of “indefinite addition” but rather #MeToo refers to an *infinite* ‘plus, plus, plus...’. However, it can be argued that addition should have the function of inscribing ambiguity. That is, the more one speaks about something, about anything that is unsayable, the more opaque it becomes. Thus the indefinite addition that characterizes #MeToo is also a recognition of unquantifiable collective suffering at the level of the signifier.

¹⁰ Joan Copjec, “Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason,” in *Supposing the Subject*, ed. Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1984), 16-44.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, 10-11.

¹² Milner, ‘Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy,’ 68.

of the signifier. We do agree that the sexual nonrapport—being, as it is, a *nonrapport—i*s asymmetrical, *and*, that #MeToo can tell us something about this. What we call into question is the claim that this asymmetry can be reduced to “two anatomically opposed subspecies, one male and one female”, which Milner ascribes to #MeToo, where *male* is on the wrong side of “an apartheid.”¹³ Instead, we offer the provocation that writing #MeToo is not only about writing the ‘disharmonious’ relation of sex (to borrow Lacan’s expression from *Seminar XVII*), but rather is about how this relation is eclipsed by the upsurge of unexpected bodily and psychic trauma and anguish, something that often cannot be said in any other way. What is truly violent, in other words, is the inability to grasp the signifier of sexual violence. #MeToo opens a space for (mis)engagement in which—whether it be harassment, bad sex, coercive sex or rape—one party (usually a man) fails to realize that the nonrapport necessarily includes himself because it does not allow for a coherent subjectivity. #MeToo attests that, in our repeated writing of the nonrelation, there is no subject-supposed-to-know about sex. Everything we say about it is *mi-dire* because the meaning of the sexual nonrelation is that we can not really *know* sex or what to do with this unknowingness. It is not the unsayable, indefinite outside of language (of arithmetic), or the nonsaid; it is the *half-sai*d contingent on and entangled with language. Sex remains an enigma, which is why we are compelled to stay with its contradiction and keep getting tripped up by it. Alenka Zupančič frames this in terms of sex as *collateral*. Although it might seem that sex can be transferred into a signifying chain of this-for-that (for example, *this* casting couch for *that* job), something undefinable remains in this nonrelation.¹⁴ Even if we follow Milner’s analogy of sex, which he ascribes to the ‘#MeToo movement’, as reducible to capitalist exchange and the labour contract,¹⁵ there always remains, as Marx observes, something extra that materializes from or exceeds the simple transaction.¹⁶ Such collateral can be disruptive, even explosive. Within the order of the *Real*, it marks the

¹³ Ibid, 81. Milner claims that “such a demand”, for “segregation” along anatomical lines is “undeniably latent in the sexual MeToo movement,” 83.

¹⁴ Alenka Zupančič, *What IS Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2017), 41.

¹⁵ Milner, “Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy,” 72-73.

¹⁶ Marx’s M-C-M’ cycle is the transformation of money into commodities and the change of communities back again into money of an altered value. This model identifies the key components as not only a material transaction but also social capital.

failure of the *this-for-that* and materializes as a stain on the signifier. In the case of #MeToo, the mark or signifier is the hashtag, ‘#’ which is the result, as Zupančič writes, of an exchange “with loaded dice.”¹⁷ She thereby builds on Lacan, who writes:

There’s no such thing as a sexual relationship because one’s jouissance of *the Other taken as a body* is always inadequate—perverse, on the one hand, insofar as the Other is reduced to object a, and crazy and enigmatic, on the other, I would say. Isn’t it on the basis of the confrontation with this impasse, with this impossibility by which a real is defined, that love is put to the test? Regarding one’s partner, love can only actualize what, in a sort of poetic flight, in order to make myself understood, I called courage—courage with respect to this fatal destiny. But is it courage that is at stake or pathways of recognition? That recognition is nothing other than the way in which the relationship said to be sexual—that has now become a subject-to-subject relationship, the subject being but the effect of unconscious knowledge—stops not being written.¹⁸

“One’s jouissance of the Other as taken as body” is always inadequate, then, but Milner’s interpretative agreement with this assertion is, arguably, restricted to enjoyment that pertains to the order of the phallus, of knowledge and of something which can be written. The appalled outrage of his rhetoric—claiming that #MeToo ominously augurs a sexual revolution which is purely contractual (such as that depicted in the *The Handmaid’s Tale*¹⁹)—would be a consequence of his supposition that the hashtag purely belongs to the Symbolic, as a replacement for the word that eludes us. In fact, the hashtag, now a universal symbol written millions of times, is not fixed but rather functions as a placeholder for something that the subject is trying to articulate in conjunction with collateral as a stain on the

¹⁷ Alenka Zupančič, *What IS Sex?*, 41

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, 144 (Emphasis added)

¹⁹ Following from his alarmist suggestion that #MeToo may lead to a compulsory IVF and mandatory “strict birth control” he still alludes to popular culture, such as the adaptation of Atwood’s novel, noting that “Although such developments seem nowadays to belong to science fiction novels or television series, there is no principled way for the sexual Me Too movement to exclude them”, 82.

presumption of a readable relation. Here we encounter a quite different terrain, one necessitating an inquiry into the Real and what Lacan calls the 'Other jouissance'. Milner's account of jouissance, we argue, remains firmly bound up with what Colette Soler calls "the jouissance of the idiot,"²⁰ because he considers the sexual nonrelation marked by #MeToo solely in terms of phallic jouissance. Soler writes:

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.²¹

At the same time, Soler does not let woman off the hook, when she goes on to say:

So, we have the definition of man - as subject, as desire caused by (a) and as phallic jouissance. And woman? We can say that it is the same but with something more.²²

Despite Milner's claim to know the breadth of women's studies, declaring that #MeToo demonstrates a "veiled contempt" for the feminist *academe*,²³

²⁰ Colette Soler, "Some Remarks on The Love Letter," *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research* 4 (1994), 12-13.

²¹ Ibid, 4

²² Ibid.

²³ Milner, "Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy," 68

Milner's account of the movement reads more like a lopsided history of the approach of men (from Plato to Kant via Lucretius) to sex as transactional, emphasizing the ineffable side of male enjoyment which women adherents of #MeToo could not possibly contemplate or even know. In these ways, Milner locates sex solely in the realm of knowledge (which is problematic since psychoanalysis is first and foremost, a *method* through which the unconscious is taken up). Don't such arguments typify the ways in which misogyny has thrived not only in Hollywood but almost everywhere, including the Academy? Despite Milner's apparent critique of a commodified or transactional sexual relation, his implication is that enjoyment, especially for the male, must pay its dividends. Otherwise, as he seems to suggest in his closing paragraphs, men may *lose out*.²⁴ Again, we see the type of male *jouissance* to which Lacan refers in *Seminar XVII*: enjoyment is only conceived in terms of what is enjoyable—that is, the kinds of returns it generates for the man.

This allows us to ask a specific question: how can we conceive misogyny in Milner's reading of #MeToo? Is it a will simply to ignore the *jouissance* of the other by taking the non-existence of the big Other literally? Does it consist in the claim that such ignorance is the secret, disgusting *jouissance* the other person really wants and has indeed insisted on all along? Or could it be the dismissal of the other person's inability to articulate what is so abhorrent about such an uptake of *jouissance*? Or rather, it is a claim, when confronted with this impossibility of knowing the other's *jouissance*, of simple unawareness? Or does he consider the turn to violence as a kind of suture to disavow realization that there is no sexual relation and never can be one? Each of these scenarios characterizes the specter of misogyny that #MeToo brings to the fore and which Milner does not address. Accordingly, #MeToo stakes its own claim, one which provokes unrest and a frustrated violence borne of anxiety, one which speaks directly to lack and to the incapacity of the phallic order to address the question, *what does a woman want?* Violence makes it possible to sustain the fantasy that the sexual relation can and does exist: one need only insist. In insisting that the sexual relation exists, the violence of misogyny also functions as a

²⁴ He writes, we think rather outrageously, that WASP Men will be rendered equivalent to "so-called savages ... Blacks, Jews, Latinos, immigrants, etc.", 85. So much for indefinite additions!

negation, that the idea of ~~woman~~ has to disappear, especially that of the #MeToo ~~woman~~.

Early on in his article, Milner expresses a distaste that #MeToo has moved “women’s studies” from “the campus” to “public opinion,” eschewing “clever articles and brilliant books” for social media.²⁵ We do not share the same contextual apprehensions about feminism as a contested public, cultural issue. In fact, feminism has always drawn upon a variety of knowledge bases; and we think that Milner’s emphasis on aspects of pop culture illustrates how this fantasy negates and circulates the public life of the #MeToo ~~woman~~. Canadian radio DJ Jian Ghomeshi and American comedian Louis C.K. are useful examples from popular culture, perhaps more illustrative than that of Harvey Weinstein and Jeffrey Epstein. All men were ‘#MeToo-ed’ and rather than remain silent in the press (as Weinstein has), they responded to the accusations against them by insisting on their knowledge of what did and didn’t constitute sex. Especially in the cases of Ghomeshi and C.K, they designated what occurred between them and their accusers simply as ‘bad sex’.

In no way are Ghomeshi and C.K. unique among those caught up in #MeToo because, for them, the answer to *what does a woman want?* can only lie in phallic knowledge, whereby the good is distinguished from the bad. Still, for C.K. in particular, the ‘bad’ paid rhetorical dividends in the form of the sentiment: ‘oh well, that happened...it probably shouldn’t have... let’s have a laugh about it’. For C.K. this became *schtick* with the incorporation of #MeToo ‘gags’ into his stand-up routine in 2019. Although much criticized, Ghomeshi, too, gained the endorsement of *The New York Review of Books*, which published his polemic.²⁶ In this case, the comic turn of this “long read” dispenses with particularities of the woman accusers in the description of what is supposed to be understood as simple clumsiness leading to bad sex. Ghomeshi has no doubt that the sexual relation—that is, the ‘good’ one— exists. It would seem that these men simply experienced the asymmetry that Milner evokes, producing a situation in which, for the man named, “the gravity of the accusation should suffice to validate the

²⁵ Ibid, 67

²⁶ Cf. Jian Ghomeshi, *Reflections on a Hashtag: My Path to Public Toxicity*, New York Review of Books, October 11, 2018

accusation itself."²⁷ And as for *The woman*? She is nowhere to be found except as the instigator of 'bad sex,' spoiling the fun. She is made to disappear.²⁸

Lauren Berlant discusses this in her essay on the 'Big Man' and his reactions to #MeToo.²⁹ Such a man, she notes, brutally toys with the Other's body not only physically but also in a post-coital masturbatory reminiscence that seeks to secure phallic jouissance, even if this whole sequence constitutes evidence of the non-relation ('bad sex'). Here again we have the logic of *this-for-that*: your (woman's) body for my (man's) enjoyment, which presumes that biological sex maps onto discursively produced gender. In the context of the non-relation, the relationship between sex and gender, in exceeding discourse, is apt to explode. Nonetheless, Milner takes up the phallic position which operates on the assumption of a homogeneous enjoyment dictated by the one with the phallus. Yet, in order for phallic jouissance to 'get off', as Soler notes, the heterogeneity of the Other's jouissance is "forgotten."³⁰ Whilst claiming to point out the non-relation of sex, Milner hangs on to what is essentially a unified relational understanding of sex – both retroactively (that previous 'women's studies' of sex is enjoyable and authentic, and suitably able to parcel out "gender from anatomy"³¹) and speculatively (that sex might become reduced to contractual arrangement³² or even, bizarrely, a kind of enforced IVF). His approach to #MeToo comes uncomfortably close to polite, well-meaning discussions of how reasoned introspection might help the subjects of

²⁷ Milner, "Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy," 67. Not one to skimp on hyperbole, Milner compares #MeToo the *Reign of Terror*...

²⁸ We can't help but think that there is a strange masculine jouissance associated with publicly declaring oneself as a bad and/or stupid lover. This weak and negative portrait of oneself as not particularly insightful about sex doesn't just provide comic relief, but a certain self-satisfaction in the guise of fake self-degradation. It is as if being willing to laugh at oneself operates at the level of both redemption and discursive concealment.

²⁹ Lauren Berlant, "The Predator and the Jokester," in *Where Freedom Starts: Sex Power Violence #MeToo* (London: Verso, 2018), 195-203.

³⁰ Colette Soler, "Some Remarks on The Love Letter," 20

³¹ Milner, 'Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy,' 81

³² Milner claims that "The Scandinavian countries" have installed a mandatory "document signed by both parties" for all consensual "sexual actions" (p. 72). We have searched for evidence of Milner's claim but can find no case in Sweden, Denmark, Finland or Norway where "all types of sexual action" must *by law* be mediated by a written contract.

trauma—to get over it! Such a rationale negates the essential insights of Freud and Lacan: that we are not subjects devoid of subjectivity and cannot, through interrogating our symptoms, strive toward such an emptying of subjectivity as a desirable lived experience. Neither do we, as subjects, need a plethora of signifiers liable to reduce everything to ideology, which Milner suggests is the function of #MeToo. In fact, Milner is scathing in his admonition of #MeToo as an example of that canard of conservatives: “the ideology of political correctness.”³³ For him, #MeToo failed, in fact “proved radically ineffective” in addressing “sexual savagery” because of its focus on “microaggressions”³⁴ and its association with “uneducated lesser celebrities” rather than the scions of “Women’s Studies.”³⁵ This bold provocation assumes that, through the circulation of #MeToo in popular culture and the shifting of the #hashtag from women of some public standing to “ordinary” citizens, a sort of wrongheaded and ideological subjectivity is installed. In Milner’s opinion, this shift obscures structural machinations of patriarchy. Further, he suggests that women marked by #MeToo misrecognize liberation in late-capitalist, neoliberal and “professionalist” appeals, not only in terms of workplace harassment but, as we have already noted, through what he sees as a reduction of ‘coitus’ to a transactional, contractual relation.

It (almost) goes without saying that we disagree with Milner here. #MeToo strives toward a recognition of ~~woman~~ as a different object—extimate, divided yet invested in division, which strengthens subjectivity through uptaking the sexed subject realized as distinctive. This realization (of subjective limits) affords a language which, rather than obliterating complex libidinal pleasures (and mutilations) puts them to work in the name of preserving subjective division.

Because we are all “speaking-beings,” as Lacan puts it, our subjectivity requires that we speak in order to leave a *mark* of our disappearance in language. This is precisely where the subject of #MeToo is situated, having not disappeared but speaking for a marked recognition. Because Milner reads the subject of #MeToo from the perspective of the phallic order, his reading includes only those who interpellate themselves

³³ Ibid, 67

³⁴ Ibid, 66

³⁵ Ibid, 67. It is also worth wondering of the possible outcomes for Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell had the #MeToo movement not erupted.

into the conduit of #MeToo: the writers of the phrase and the other, the subject to which the writers are referring. Milner positions himself (and therefore the reader) as the third term, the paternal metaphor, thus sidestepping the Lacanian position that the lack of sexual relation applies here no less than to everyone, everywhere. Thus, for him there is no sovereign position for *anyone* concerning #MeToo.

Milner begins and ends with a curious theory of the subject that implies a certain normative trajectory where articulation must inevitably lead to the final and full realization that, not only has subjectivity disappeared, but it never even began. Reducing subjective moments purported by #MeToo to naturalizing bodily encounters essentializes the subject (especially that of woman, which to some might be appealing) rather than rendering them as encounters where the body is traumatized, where the subject is forced to confront not only subjective division but also the impossibility that this traumatic cut can be sutured. He writes that the problem with “Me Too’s conception of coitus” is that it effaces “relation[s] between human beings” for that of “material bodies, defined by their material anatomy.”³⁶ What does this tell us? That, for Milner, there is no ~~woman~~ beyond the body? It seems that, for Milner, speaking subjects are subjectless and acephalous, mindlessly clutching at whatever signifiers are thrown their way—so beholden, according to him, to the bodily “anatomical determinism.”³⁷ In Milner’s position of so-called objectivity, the subject becomes a singular subject in speaking, represented (in relation to the Other) by a signifier for another signifier. We think that this is not in itself a problem. What is troubling, however, is that, for Milner, subjectivity never struggles beyond this.

The absence of subjectivity in Milner’s position misses an important point: that the #MeToo subject subjectivates herself through the signifiers and discourses of #MeToo which are (and always were) alienating. Here we can speculate that #MeToo is potentially a radical alterity that goes to the very core of the #MeToo subject, because it does not obfuscate the frustration and anxiety of what it means to be a libidinal subject. #MeToo puts all subjects to work, insisting that, through language, they lay their

³⁶ Ibid, 81

³⁷ Ibid.

sexuated cards on the table. In this way, #MeToo operates as an Other on the side of the #MeToo subject.

Strangely enough, the authority of #MeToo lies in the special character of the hashtag #, which is always a *mi-dire* and therefore always ineffable.³⁸ Through its manifold repetition, however, a sort of knowledge emerges, one that pivots on jouissance and thus suggests a truth that, although enigmatic and only ever half-said, effaces the jouissance to which truth as knowledge owes its articulation. If, following Lacan's Borromean topology, we understand the hashtag as an opening onto the Real, it leads us toward the Other's jouissance outside the "fictitious marriage between truth and knowledge,"³⁹ toward the affective *collateral* of contemporary culture, rather than toward the phallic jouissance (perhaps) enjoyed through the pop culture language of #Trending Tags. Whether hinging on fantasy of either the revered or reviled proposition, such hashtags exemplify what Soler calls the overriding mood of capitalism, the only true affect of which is anxiety.

Capitalism as such has replaced symbolic productions by the objects it produces. People talk a great deal about the rise of depression in our era, but the true mood illness of capitalism is anxiety. Its rise in civilization followed – from Kierkegaard, and even Pascal – that of scientific capitalism [...]. This is logical, moreover, for anxiety is the affect tied to subjective destitution; it is affect that arises when the subject perceives himself as an object.⁴⁰

Soler then goes on to make a damning claim:

³⁸ It is interesting that in his title, Milner omits the # and phrases 'Me' 'Too' separately, rather than as conjoined.

³⁹ Ingrid Porto de Figueirido, "Knowledge, Truth and Jouissance: The Wall of Language and the Poetic Function," *Agora XX* (May / August, 2017), 459-275.

⁴⁰ Colette Soler, *Lacanian Affects. The Function of Affect in Lacan's Work*, trans. Bruce Fink (London: Routledge, 2015), 38.

Scientific capitalism with its technological effects brings about destitution far more radically than psychoanalysis; it uses and abuses subjects as instruments.⁴¹

Thus in terms of the Lacanian subject, the enunciation of the hashtags, in opening on to the Real, point towards a formalization of the anxious subject. The iteration of oneself as the #Me of #MeToo not only articulates the subject as *objet a* but also indicates a struggle unto discourse consistent with the social bond in a situation where, in the absence of the barred subject, the Symbolic is increasingly corroded while Capitalist discourse remains ascendant. The abundance of commentary on the supposed failure of hashtags, of which Milner's can be included, shows that such experience of absence of lack, the sense that the tags go unheard, evaporate in the disappearing body of *mi-dire*, demonstrates this anxiety. When attempting to account for subjects that do indeed matter and whose bodies are at stake, Milner's erasure of subjectivity is, we find, frankly troubling.

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⁴¹ Ibid.