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A method for change. Lacanian discourse analysis: a glimpse into climate policy

Abstract

In this article, I propose a return to Jacques Lacan, I develop a Lacanian discourse analysis (LDA) as one possible method in International Relations and demonstrate its potential by sketching out the case of climate change policy within the European Union. Lacan's theory of the four discourses as conceptual "mind maps" inform a method of discourse analysis enabling researchers to empirically investigate how a hegemonic discourse can be challenged and potentially subverted. A Lacanian perspective emphasises the "subject of the enunciation" and conceptualises subjects as socially produced but lacking: discourse provides an historicised socio-linguistic structure sustaining the subject's societal relations, but the speaking activity always produces a cut within subjectivity, which manifests as an excess-loss of meaning in the enunciation. Via the case study of the energy efficiency policy in the EU, I first illustrate how a LDA allows us to investigate climate knowledge and the authority of the discourse. Then, by looking at how energy efficiency is spoken in the enunciation, I expose the excess of meaning produced as an effect of language which "fractures" the discourse. Finally, I show how to leverage on these produced fractures to assess the transformative and empowering potential of the observed discourse.

Subject: IR theory, discourse studies, discourse analysis, methodology, climate change, EU, energy efficiency

Introduction

In this paper I contribute to the poststructuralist strand of International Relations (IR) and argue that the field of discourse studies and discourse analysis is far from exhausting its potential as a theoretical and methodological instrument in the discipline. To accomplish this, I propose a return to Jacques Lacan's theory of the four discourses, I develop a fit for empirics' Lacanian discourse analysis (LDA) as one possible methodology in IR and briefly demonstrate its applicability via the case of the European Union' climate change mitigation policy. As I will demonstrate, a LDA helps understand the mechanisms by which, in a seemingly consistent and closed discourse, ruptures are produced as an effect of language on the speaking subjects. Importantly, I show how to leverage on these breaking points of the discourse to challenge and potentially subvert a hegemonic discourse and produce an alternative and transformative discourse.

IR poststructuralist scholarship acknowledges that language itself is a field of social practice. Common to scholars of discourse within this sub-strand of IR is the view that discourse is a system or structure of signification that constructs meanings (Milliken 1999).[1] Influenced by Michel Foucault's work on disciplinary power, regimes of truth and governmentality (Foucault 1980; 1979; 1977; 1972), poststructuralist scholars in IR illuminated how discourse constitutes power relations because discourse enables, constrains and excludes what can be thought, defines who is allowed to speak and thus produces objects and subjects (Doty 1993; 1999; Weber 1998; Milliken 1999; Hansen 2006; Oels 2005; Shepherd 2013; 2015; Griffin 2009; Herschinger 2011). These Foucault-inspired discursive approaches enabled scholars to investigate meaning struggles and detect competing discourses to understand why some policies come about based on the definitions and the truths produced in given time and space (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, 177; Epstein 2011). However, scholars also observe that these contributions fail in analytically explaining *how* and *why* a given discourse or a given meaning prevails (Solomon 2015, 18-19; Leipold et al., 2019, 457) and also argue that these approaches downplay the role of the subject, as the latter is constrained and subjugated to power, which in turn hinders the possibility of resistance and change (Bracher and Alcorn 1994, 29-35; Epstein 2011; see also Butler 1997; Bou Ali 2018).

In this paper, I suggest a return to Jacques Lacan's theory of discourse because Lacan envisages a possibility of a transformative discourse, via the central role of the subject. From a chronological perspective, it is worth pointing out that Lacan was born a quarter century before Foucault, and Bou

[1] Discourse analysis in political science has been influenced by different philosophical traditions. Leipold et al. (2019) include: Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) Discourse Theory, Roe's (1994) Narrative Policy Analysis, Fairclough's (2010) and Wodak's (2011) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Dryzek's (1997) Deliberative Discourse Analysis influenced by Habermas (1996), Hajer's (1995) Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA), and Keller's (2011) Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD).

Ali (2018) notes that although their chronologies have been to some extent parallel, they rarely (if ever) intersected or overlapped. They both aimed at elaborating a critical epistemology, highlighting the problems of including the scientific discourse – notably natural, life and even human sciences – in the mechanisms of the capitalist power (Tomšič 2018, 90-91). Yet, they diverged on several issues such as the theory of the subject and the subject's relation to truth, history and historicism, scientific formalization as well as politics (Bou Ali 2018, 12-13). In fact, although Foucault polemised with psychoanalysis and circumvented its fundamental notion – the unconscious (Zupančič, 2016; Dolar 2018, 53-54) – critics acknowledge that an echo of Lacan is perceived throughout his oeuvre. For example, it is perceived in Foucault's attempts to provide a theory of the subject overcoming Kantian transcendentalism (Bou Ali 2018, 16) as well as in his interest in discontinuities, ruptures and limits, to the extent that both Lacan and Foucault detected in failure and irregularity a key dimension of truth, which is in turn related to the constitution of subjectivity (Tomšicˇ2018, 92).

In Lacan's theory of discourse, the subject takes centre-stage: discourse provides the subject with an overarching socio-linguistic structure allowing them to establish and maintain societal relations, yet this socio-linguistic structure can never fully complete the subject. More to the point, the speaking activity always produces a cut within subjectivity which manifests as an excess of meaning and which is perceived as a loss in the enunciation: as a result, conclusive and full meaning is constantly deferred. Lacan explains this loss through two key conceptual tools, namely *objet petit a*, which triggers desire, and its associated paradoxical (dis)satisfaction *jouissance*. This produced excess-loss of meaning makes it possible to appreciate the active role of the subject insofar as the "lack" it introduces is what produces fractures in the discourse: potentially, these fractures can either disrupt the dominant signification and generate the conditions for alternative significations or can be neutralised and positively integrated into the status quo signification. In fact, according to Lacan, there are four possible historically determined discourses - and a fifth variant (Campbell 2016, 241; Feldner and Vighi 2015, 71; Žižek 2006, 109). When conducting LDA in an empirical context, these four discourses can be used as mind maps enabling us to reflect on any produced fractures and ultimately assess whether they can challenge and potentially subvert a given discourse, as each discourse describes a different type of knowledge underlying different power relationships as well as a different subject. More specifically, the Master's discourse as the discourse of power and command, and the University discourse as the discourse of knowledge describe the reproduction of some form of domination. By contrast, the Hysteric's discourse as the discourse of questioning and challenging and the Analyst discourse as the discourse of psychoanalysis constitute the most empowering dimension of Lacan's theory as they respectively challenge the status quo and potentially generate real change by producing the desire for different significations.

Building on this theoretical apparatus, I operationalise Lacan's discourse theory into a research practice of data collection and analysis and maintain that the starting point of analysis is the enunciating act, what comes from the subject of the enunciation, with its excess of meaning (Lacan 2006). As I will illustrate, the socio-linguistic structure of climate action manifests itself as a set of discursive practices that make up its governance and policymaking. In the pursuit of climate objectives, the speaking subjects – such as government representatives, the various interest groups and the citizens – presuppose a signifying machine determining the climate relations available to them. These take the shape of – inter alia – negotiations, target setting, modelling activities, policy formulation and implementation, technology development, reporting mechanisms, future policy revision, new "green" jobs. Within this framework, by taking a signifier such as *energy efficiency* as unit of analysis in a series of enunciating acts, it is possible to position the speaking subject's relation to (climate) knowledge and disrupt a seemingly consistent climate discourse by capturing the excess of meaning produced by the speaking subjects as an effect of language. Depending on how these gaps, contradictions, and blind spots are handled by the subjects, we can ultimately assess the transformative and empowering potential of the observed (climate) discourse.

Notably, a LDA in IR implies a shift away from common views of discourse as intentional framings and competing storylines (Hajer, 1995; Epstein 2008; Leipold et al., 2019), or from the idea that language misunderstandings are deliberately and instrumentally used (Litfin 1994; Hajer, 1995;) by societal actors to exert subtle forms of power. A LDA exposes the *unintended* effects of language on the speaking subjects and leverages on the subject's unintentional coping mechanisms to explain if and how paradigm change and transformation can occur. This way not only does a return to Lacan revive what is perceived as an obsolete debate on the role of language in international politics, but it also adds to existing discussions on agency (Braun, Schindler & Wille 2018), status quo and change (Edkins 2019) in contemporary IR.

The article proceeds in three parts. In the first part, I briefly outline the contours of the debate and introduce a degree of familiarity with abstract terms that characterise Lacan's theoretical work, such as "discourse", "subject", "objet petit a", "jouissance" to make them operational in the empirical sense. In this way, we come to understand the three realms of discourse, that is the Symbolic (the visible linguistic structure), the Imaginary (one's individual mental representation), and ultimately the Real (the excess-loss that escapes language) as held together by the subject in the enunciation. In the second part I delve into Lacan's theory of the four discourses. This theory illustrates the relationship between a historicised discourse and socially produced yet lacking subjects and enables us to picture – through a graphical representation – the subjects' relationship to knowledge and its authority, as well as how they cope with the produced excess-residue of meaning. In the final section,

I develop a method of empirical research and explore how Lacan's psychoanalytic theory provides a useful framework for reflecting on the nature of a major contemporary IR issue – climate change – with my subject of choice – the EU. With the help of examples from the EU's energy efficiency policies, I illustrate how a seemingly consistent discourse of climate knowledge can be opened and disrupted to assess how its breaking points are handled by speaking subjects, and this ultimately allows us to account for stability and change in discourse.

Discourse and IR: why a return to Jacques Lacan?

In the 1980s, the language turn constituted a turning point within the positivist bent of the discipline of International Relations: in contrast with positivists who treat language as a closed system of ready-made tools to convey meanings coming from the outside, the so-called poststructuralist scholarship acknowledged that language itself is a field of social practice. By providing a more radical critique than social constructivism (Wendt 1992), scholars of discourse argued that language is performative, and that discourse is a system or structure of signification that constructs meanings (Milliken 1999). A focus on discourse makes it possible to start from the speakers – who speaks? (Epstein 2011, 342) – and explore a world politics object in a non-atomistic way by considering the complexity of actors and institutions that populate a policy landscape because it does not presume core properties and "essences" of subjects and objects. Michel Foucault's work on disciplinary power, regimes of truth and governmentality (Foucault 1980; 1979;1977; 1972) profoundly influenced poststructuralist scholars in IR by illuminating how a discursive understanding of knowledge production performs power relations, and this perspective enabled IR scholars to illuminate how some policies come about based on the definitions and the truths produced in given time and space (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, 177; Epstein 2011). Over time, competing frameworks such as a sociology-inspired practice turn (Neumann 2002; Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2011, Hughes 2015) and a new materialist turn (Coole 2013; Bennett 2010) challenged poststructuralism's alleged excessive emphasis on language (see Aradau et al. 2015; Lundborg and Vaughan William 2015 and Drieschova 2017) by prioritising, respectively, the role of practices and processes, and the constitutive role of objects and materiality. For the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to acknowledge that the power of discourse as well as power relations in discourse do not always manifest as speech or words. A focus on discourse allows us in fact to grasp how language is ingrained in practices and in the material (Shapiro 1981; Der Derian 1987) insofar as discourse defines knowledgeable practices, delimits the range of policy options and eventually creates a truth effect that has a disciplining function in society (Doty 1993; Weber 1998; Milliken 1999, Hansen 2006; Oels 2005; Shepherd 2013; Griffin 2009; Herschinger 2011). For example, the meaning of a material object such as an electric car cannot be grasped outside

discourse insofar as its material and social (re)production establishes and perpetrates specific relationships between stakeholders such as the mines industry, the car industry, the citizens as buyers-consumers. Furthermore, any meaning-making or agentic capacity cannot be attributed to its matter alone insofar as it presupposes human speaking subjects to be maintained and perpetrated.

Although the achievements of Foucauldian discursive approaches cannot be disregarded as these make it possible to reflect on existing meaning struggles and detect competing discourses, scholars observe that these fail in analytically explaining *how* and *why* a given discourse prevails (Solomon 2015, 18-19; Leipold et al., 2019, 457) and downplay the role of the subject, as the latter is constrained and subjugated to power, which in turn hinders the possibility of resistance and change (Bracher and Alcorn 1994, 29-35; Epstein 2011; see also Butler 1997; Bou Ali 2018). Instead, in this article I suggest a return to Jacques Lacan because he envisages the possibility of a discourse of transformation as an alternative to the discourse of power, and because he allows us to overcome the common understanding of discourse qua meaning struggle and competing narratives. As I will explain in this article, a Lacanian perspective can be appreciated when we consider the peculiarity of the "enunciating act": the enunciation exposes the effects of language on the speaking subjects as well as their coping mechanisms, which are of crucial importance if we wish to detect, challenge and potentially subvert a hegemonic discourse.

This article contributes to the poststructuralist strand of IR insofar as a Lacanian reading of discourse remains its focus, yet Lacan's theory makes it possible to engage with multiple debates beyond conventional IR theory. For example, the psychoanalytic foundation of Lacan's theory and the role of the subject's lack allow us to cross paths with existentialist readings of IR: these recent approaches emphasise the constitutive function and productive force of anxiety (see Rumelili 2020; 2021) as well as the role of anxiety in the subject's formation and in the subject's relationship with authority (Zevnik 2021). Further, Lacan's preoccupation with change and transformation adds to the constellation of discussions on agency (Braun, Schindler & Wille 2018) and change, which include – inter alia – contributions on Gramscian counterhegemony (Scholl and Freyberg-Inan 2013; Ciplet et al. 2015); theoretical reflections on change informed by complex systems theories (Gunitsky, 2013) and related critical theory appraisals (Malaina 2014); and quantum social science approaches (O'Brien and Milkoreit, 2022).

The researcher's "mind maps": the theory of the four discourses

Before delving into an in-depth analysis of Lacan's theory of the four discourses and the development of LDA as a method, I will illustrate how to understand the enunciating act through its main

components –discourse and subject – which will serve as a point of reference for the reader in case they get lost in the discussion. More to the point, the relationship between signifiers helps us appreciate discourse as structure, whereas the paradox of language helps us understand the relationship between discourse and subject and investigate agentic and possibly emancipatory opportunities. These elements together make it possible to grasp the three realms of discourse – Symbolic, Imaginary, Real – insofar as they are presupposed by the subject in the enunciating act, which constitutes the starting point in empirical research.

Discourse and subject. Lacan refers to discourse as the social bond (*lien social*) founded on language (Lacan 2007, 13), that is an overarching and presupposed socio-linguistic structure that allows the speaking beings' (*parlêtres*) to establish and maintain their intersubjective societal relations. In drawing on Ferdinand De Saussure's theory of linguistic signs (1959), Lacan maintains that signification is produced as an effect of the sliding of the signifiers along the dual dimension of metonymy and metaphor. The sliding of signifiers is not endless but halted by anchoring points, called the Master Signifier(s) (S1) which naturalise the meaning of the signifying chain – representing "knowledge" (S2) – and fix its semantic ambiguity. This Master Signifier (S1) is what establishes and produces seemingly consistent significations and consequently power relations, because the rest of the signifying chain representing "knowledge" (S2) depends on this dominant signifier. In practice, this anchoring move gives reality apparent stability and provides the necessary illusion that reality is consistent (Fink 1999; Klepec 2016). Likewise, the speaking subject presupposes language – we cannot function without a social link – and resorts to this fictious yet necessary socio-linguistic networks of signifiers available to them to create sense and more widely to establish and maintain any intersubjective societal relations. However, the socio-linguistic order – which pre-exists the subject – can never fully complete the subject as the act of speaking always produces a fundamental ambiguity of signification, which defines us as humans (Lacan, 1998, 204-05). This ambiguity, which is precisely where unconscious drives inscribe themselves,[2] is perceived as a loss (*perte*) in the enunciation. Lacan explains this excess of meaning perceived as loss with a small object, the *objet petit a*: this conceptual tool stands for the unattainable cause of desire which carries a liberating potential (Lacan 2007, 13-18), where "liberation" refers to the possibility of a paradigm change. Because of this ontological lack, "meaning" slips metonymically across signifiers and full signification is always deferred and, as a result, this residue of signification becomes visible in the gaps, weaknesses, and blind spots that "crack" the discourse and make it look always partial and

[2] Lacan reinterprets the unconscious in conjunction with the socio-linguistic system that determines the subject as a speaking being and thus forms our social reality (Tomšič and Zevnik 2016, 2; Evans 1996, 220).

inconsistent. Ultimately, *objet petit a* embodies the impossible and endlessly deferred full satisfaction that is lost while enunciating, and which results in a paradoxical (dis)satisfaction called *jouissance* (Stavrakakis .1999, 49-53). Within this framework, the Lacanian subject is the subject of the enunciation produced by language as a surplus-lack of sense and "split" between the desire of full representation with language and its missed and impossible realisation (Lacan 2007, 13). By way of example, a split can be generated in the subject because of their desire to come up with an effective climate action and the linguistic structures defining and performing the knowledge qua available discursive representations to which they inevitably resort.

In summary, the peculiarity of Lacan's is thus that he highlights the socio-political production of an incomplete subjectivity rather than the positive substantiality of the human psyche: the subject attempts to constantly fill their lack with available social discursive representations providing them with socio-political objects of identification and with a stable yet ambiguous and fragile identity (Stavrakakis 1999, 14). Hence, the Lacanian split subject of the enunciation does not collapse the social onto the individual level (Stavrakakis 1999, 14; Epstein 2011; Edkins 1999) nor does it fall into the opposite fallacy of a "free" unconstrained conscious agent, in that it considers the constraints exerted by a socio-linguistic structure which – as it becomes evident in Lacan's theory of the four discourses – is historically determined. Rather, the active role of the subject can be understood by looking at how they handle or cope with this constitutive lack, which would be difficult to explain by referring to a subject that is purely "structural" and purely subjugated to power. In fact, this produced excess-loss can either disrupt the dominant signification and generate the conditions for alternative significations or can be neutralised and positively integrated into the status quo signification.

Symbolic, Imaginary, Real. The relationship between discourse, subject and lack can be further clarified by summarising the three realms of discourse that are held together by the subject, insofar as they are presupposed in enunciation. The visible realm is the Symbolic, that is the socio-linguistic network in which we are embedded and to which we resort in our intersubjective relations. The second register is the Imaginary, the realm of meaning, that is our individual mental representations of a given signifier. Mental representations can be similar, but not identical for everyone (Pavón Cuéllar et al. 2010, 2). For example, in the case of the signifier *renewables* I can think of solar panels (the technology) or even a type of energy (solar energy), while my interviewee can think of wind turbines (the technology) or a different type of energy (wind energy). But meaning can be reduced to a content that is similar but not identical – in this case, a set of energy sources that can be naturally replenished and their related technologies. The key element in Lacan's theory is the third realm called the Real, the realm of *objet a*, and *jouissance,* which is non-symbolisable and yet produced by the Symbolic

(language) the moment when the subject speaks, as a surplus and nonsensical remainder. One of the aims of a Lacanian discourse analysis is precisely to expose the Real, that is revealing the non sensical, partial character of the signifier, through which the researcher can assess how the subject copes with this "lack".

The four discourses. For exemplificatory purposes, discourse and subject have been regarded so far in general and ahistorical terms, as if there is only one possible social bond and one subject. This move was necessary to clarify what we mean by enunciation in the Lacanian sense and what the main elements of his theory are. In fact, according to Lacan, there are four possible social bonds. These four discourses, which are historically determined (Campbell 2016, 241; Feldner and Vighi 2015, 71; Žižek 2006, 109), can be used as theoretical guidelines in a Lacanian discourse analysis as they illuminate the relationship between subject and discourse and thus between the Symbolic and the Real. These discourses place at the centre of the analysis the lacking but socially produced subjects, who are split between the pursuit of full representation with language and a historicised signifying structure defining them and regulating their actions.

These conceptual tools are represented through a framework of four fixed positions, where the upper part represent the conscious dimension while the lower part stands for the unconscious, the repressed or disavowed (Figure. 1).

Insert Figure 1 in here

Figure 1: The fixed framework

This framework can be regarded as a scheme of communication (Klepec 2016) and this is precisely what we should bear in mind when "filtering" data from the field: on the top left there is the agent of discourse which is the message sender, whereas on the top right there is the other which is the receiver of the message sent by the agent. The agent and the receiving other are not necessarily a person, but they can be a locus. For instance, the EU Commission representing the supranational interests of its Member States, or a United Nations campus hosting a climate conference (the famous COPs). On the bottom left there is the unconscious truth of discourse, and on the bottom right we find the product-loss of discourse. The position of unconscious truth on the bottom left reveals that the agent is never fully in charge of the discourse.

Figure 2 illustrates that these discourses are open and partial despite appearing closed and totalising (Lacan 2007, 45).[3]

Insert Figure 2 in here

Figure 2:The four discourses with their fifth variant

As each social bond describes a different type of knowledge underlying different power relationships and a different subject, we can understand the differences between Lacan's discourses by looking at the social effects they produce (Bracher 1993).

The Master's discourse as the discourse of power and command and the University discourse as the discourse of knowledge, education and indoctrination describe the reproduction of some form of domination. The Hysteric's discourse is the discourse of desiring, questioning and challenging; finally, and importantly, the Analyst discourse is the discourse of psychoanalysis, which is driven by the potential for transformation (Bracher 1993, 53). These two latter discourses constitute the most empowering dimensions of Lacan's theory as they respectively challenge the status quo and potentially generate real change by producing the desire for different significations. In practice, these conceptual apparatuses enable us to reflect on whether any produced fractures can shake the foundation of (or even subvert) a given discourse.

The University discourse and the Hysteric's discourse: comparing "knowledge". The opposition between the University discourse of hegemonic knowledge and the Hysteric's discourse of real knowledge, can be regarded as the entry point of discussion on what constitutes knowledge and expertise in a policy field. The University discourse, with knowledge (S2) in command, indicates for Lacan the hegemony of modern science. It is a type of knowledge that asserts itself as neutral, measurable, quantifiable, and bureaucratised and which tends to mere rationalisation, or as Fink put it "a kind of encyclopaedic endeavour to exhaust a field" (1999, 37). However, the agent of the discourse is always commanded by an unconscious truth (Figure 1) – the real and hidden engine of the discourse – in this case occupied by the hidden Master Signifier S1 (Figure 2). In other words, this apparently neutral knowledge disavows its performative (Žižek 2004, 394) and fictional dimension under a flat and apparently objective knowledge and, as a presupposition, it shapes our free thinking, our analysis, our allegedly unbiased scientific inquiries but also our liberal ideologies (Pavón Cuéllar et al. 2010, 264-65). In this unconscious power relationship represented by the disavowed Master Signifier S1, knowledge S2 works for this Master Signifier and delivers in fact

[3] For Lacan - influenced by May 1968 events - knowledge in modernity has been transformed into a countable and quantifiable entity, as the right-hand of capitalism (Lacan 2007, 177).

partial truths. In this discourse, the allegedly neutral scientific knowledge S2 attempts to control *objet a*, by integrating it into signification and turning "lack" into a consumption object. Therefore, as this object is co-opted into signification it significantly loses its disturbing, traumatic, and therefore transformative potential (Wright 2016, 142; Feldner and Vighi 2015, 93). Knowledge then becomes the vehicle through which the paradoxical (dis)satisfaction *jouissance* is produced, mastered, transmitted, and commodified (Lacan 2007, 67; Wright 2016, 138-42). As a result, the subject $, or rather, different and deeply fraught subjectivities are produced and defined by this new set of signifiers, who are excluded from relating and acting upon the Master Signifier S1 (Figure 2). However, *objet a* as excess of sense remains, it is not made symbolisable for the fact of being in the place of the other (top right).

Authentic scientific enquiry is associated instead with the Hysteric's discourse (Lacan 1990, 19; Lacan 2007, 23) where the split subject $ calls into question the dominant knowledge and thus the dominant power relationships (the Master Signifier S1). This is a type of knowledge that needs to think of complex systems to gain a comprehensive understanding of reality, with all the difficulties and contradictions that this might entail. Although the Hysteric's discourse is the name of one of the discourses, this does not mean that a "hysteric" subject functions only within this Hysteric's discourse, and the same reasoning can be applied in relation to the analyst and the Analyst discourse. For example, as an academic or a stakeholder, the hysterics can function within the dominant status quo social link of University discourse/Capitalist discourse, and these can be detected through the analysis of potentially transformative forces in the field. However, we should bear in mind that their efficacy is affected by the law of the dominant social bond, since the effects and shortcomings are decided within that specific discourse (Fink 1999, 30).

The Capitalist discourse: enjoyment unbound. The parallel between the University discourse of "commanded knowledge" and the Capitalist discourse of commodified enjoyment helps identify how the impossibility of the discourse is turned into commodified knowledge and consumption objects of identification. In the early 1970s, Lacan complemented this theory with a fifth discourse, the discourse of the Capitalist (Lacan 1972, 32-40). This fifth discourse illustrates the replacement or transformation of the old previous relations of authority, power and domination (Feldner and Vighi 2015, 75; Koren 2014, 254; Tomsič 2016, 258) which has become invisible but pervasive and more authoritarian, via a transformation of the place of knowledge that led to its quantification, commodification and rationalisation (Lacan 2007, 29-32; Koren 2014, 254; Campbell 2016, 141-42; Tomsič 2016, 158, Boni 2014, 136). The University discourse and the Capitalist discourse are complementary as they are in truth subjected to the same unconscious command in the position of

truth, the Master Signifier (S1). However, the Capitalist discourse places greater emphasis on the "industrialisation of desire" (Lacan 1973, 94) by addressing the relationship between discourse and the Real of *jouissance* (Lacan 1972, 32-40). The skill of the Capitalist discourse is that it exploits the structure of the perpetually desiring lacking subject qua worker-consumer reducing it to demand, as a means of endlessly reproducing itself and without ever satisfying them. The system provides the subject with commodified objects of enjoyment, whether scientific development or the market, and this gives a temporary sense of plenitude that strengthens this position of enjoyment as a must, not as painful lack (Šumič 2016, 33; Feldner and Vighi 2015, 71-72).

In short, if in the University discourse *jouissance* is accessed through knowledge production, in the Capitalist discourse lack is valorised and turned into a positive feature (Feldner and Vighi 2015, 82-83; Tomsič 2016, 158-60), becoming surplus-*jouissance* (*plus de jouir*, where "plus" means both excess and lack). If we look at the vectoral representation of this discourse represented in Figure.2, the Capitalist discourse pictures a seemingly closed circuit of enjoyment for which there is no gap or excess, as if it intended to model consumers' satisfaction (Wright 201, 143-44). Although the impossibility of discourse is concealed, this does not mean that it disappears altogether. Therefore, once the fractures of discourse are exposed through a Lacanian discourse analysis, a key point is to look at how the paradoxical (dis)satisfaction *jouissance* is manifested and "trapped" and observe if there is any way in which it returns to be traumatically disruptive and pave the way for a possible revolution of discourse.

The Analyst discourse: room for social change? Lacan does not exclude the possibility of real change, yet he often warned his students about the force of the social link qua structure, which manifests in our praxis, habits, affections to the extent that what we might consider radical change might not be in fact radical insofar as this retains the same logic of operation (Klepec 2016, 116-17; Bracher 1993, 73-74). Hence, if the Hysteric's discourse is the discourse of real and impossible knowledge, the desire to know leads us to the Analyst discourse,[4] which is the discourse of transformation and real change. In a clinical context, the analysis helps the patient identify the excluded part of their being – the *a,* the cause of the analysand's desire. The Analyst discourse conceives the analyst as the embodiment of the subject's lack and the position of the agent – the position occupied by the analyst in the treatment – is occupied in the schema precisely by *objet petit a*. The analyst interrogates the subjects in their division ($) and sets the analysand to produce language associations with the aim of producing a new Master Signifier (S1) (Fink 1999, 37-38). More to the point, Bracher (1993) notes that the analyst works to extract from the analysand a hysterical structure of discourse to make them

[4] Knowledge S2 in the position of truth is not the same as that of the University discourse.

identify the Masters Signifiers that form the alienating identification. This is a painful and disruptive process often dominated by anxiety and meaninglessness. Yet the analyst does not promptly provide the analysand with a new Master Signifier (S1) and knowledge (S2) but rather redirects the analysand's demand in a way that allows for the resurfacing of the left out and repressed. This process eventually exposes the underlying fantasy, that is socio-symbolic constructions that promise to cover the impossibility of full representation, to which the analysand clung. The final aim of this process involves traversing the fantasy which means recognizing the deficiency of the socio-symbolic fiction as well as understanding that those (unconscious) fantasies that have been painfully driving one's desire are in fact relative and arbitrary. The analysand then accepts that the lack-excess is inevitable and certainty impossible (Edkins 2019) and acknowledges this fantasy as their means of *jouissance* (Bracher 1993, 69-72). The Analyst discourse illustrates the emancipatory and revolutionary dimension of Lacan's theory, but it should be carefully approached when deployed in a critique of a socio-political phenomenon. As any psychoanalytical treatment cannot guarantee success of change, the analyst cannot anticipate or even guarantee ahead of time any success of real social change (Bracher 1993, 80). Perhaps, this discourse serves as a reminder against a discourse of fictious change – the cases of "greenwashing" qua semblant changes in climate action are emblematic – and the researcher might not necessarily be facing an actual changed subject and new signification patterns in a time-constrained field research.

The potential for a Lacanian discourse analysis in (climate) action

To illustrate the potential for a Lacanian discourse analysis in IR, I will briefly introduce my object of research in international politics. Climate change politics is a complex object of research for two main reasons. First, climate change is a phenomenon that intersects with other biophysical phenomena, such as biodiversity loss and pollution, or other social phenomena such as energy (in)security and forced migrations. Second, climate governance manifests itself as a multi-stakeholder and multi-level process and involves the interplay of a wide range of actors and institutions across multiple levels of analysis. Thus, treating it as a single-issue area – or treating a state as an atomistic unit – risks oversimplifying this complexity and excludes important aspects in the analysis. It is for this reason that discursive approaches lend itself well to investigating climate change action. They help understand the messy and complex interactions that make up the environmental policy process (Sharp and Richardson 2001, 194) and how the evocative concepts that populate the policy landscape, such as "mitigation", "decarbonisation", "adaptation" "capacity building", are thought and constituted. As the Lacanian apparatus retains the centrality of the subject, my subject of choice for

this illustration will be the EU. The EU has historically been responsive to environmental damage since the 1970s, and more recently to scientifically informed climate warnings (IPCC special report 2018) and has pushed for binding international commitments since the Kyoto Protocol (1997) under the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These international commitments have been matched by internal supranational commitments with the entry into force in 2009 of the 20-20-20 regulatory framework[5]. These 20-20-20 regulatory framework has successfully come to an end and despite the criticism addressed for not matching the high ambition advocated at the international level (Oberthür, Pallemaerts & Kelly 2010), the EU has established its future climate and energy plans. First, the EU launched their "Clean Energy package for all European citizens" which sets higher more ambitious targets[6] for the period 2021-2030 and this has been revised by the more ambitious Fit For 55 package (2021-2022). Second, the EU paved the way for the road to decarbonisation by 2050. First, the Commission issued a provisional Communication "A Clean Planet for all - A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy" (COM (2018) 773 final), which provided a statement of intents and possibilities through future scenarios. Then, they presented the "EU Green Deal", (COM (2019) 640 final) which is today the framework for all EU's strategies and policies in the field of climate action, although the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine delayed its progress. Both the mid-term and the long-term strategies intertwine with the implementation of the Paris Agreements (2015) under the UNFCCC which commits its parties to keep global warming below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C (Paris Agreement 2015, Art.2) but leaves to the parties how decarbonisation will be conducted.

The perceived green reputation of the EU, its sustained commitment to the development of environmental policies as well as the alleged transitional aspect of this new phase of policymaking provides an interesting backdrop for a LDA not merely to engage with a critique of market-based policy solutions such as the well-known European Trading System (ETS), where the relationship between the knowledge put to work (S2) and the authority of discourse (S1) might even be self-explanatory. Rather, a Lacanian perspective makes it possible to engage with the complexity of policy tools and concepts that play a key role in these strategies of transition which are apparently unproblematic and even desirable. Policy tools such as "energy efficiency", "renewables" or even the more recent "circular economy" can be potentially regarded as desirable change carriers, as no one

[5] This framework aimed at reducing GHG emissions by 20%, increasing the share of renewables by 20%, increasing energy efficiency by 20%. by 2020 compared to 1990 levels.

[6] This new framework initially set the share of renewables by 32%, an improvement for energy efficiency by 32.5% and a reduction of GHGs emissions by at least 40%, compared to 1990 levels. Under the Fit for 55 package (2021/22), the EU aims to revise all its legislation in line with a 55% reduction of GHG emissions.

would argue against having equipment or devices that consume less energy, use renewable energy, or are recycled and re-manufactured.

Towards a method of Lacanian discourse analysis. The excursus on Lacan's theory conducted in this paper served the purpose of providing a framework for developing a method of Lacanian discourse analysis. As a reminder, from a Lacanian standpoint discourse is the overarching socio linguistic structure that allows us to establish and maintain our societal relations. At the same time, the subject is the "subject of the enunciation", produced by language as a surplus-lack of sense and "split" between the desire of full representation with language and its missed realisation (Lacan 2007, 13). Emphasising the enunciating act is thus paramount, because it is in the gap between what the subject wants to say and what they actually say that we can expose the "cracks" of the discourse by revealing the non-sensical character of the signifier, observe how these are handled by the speaking subject with the help of the framework provided by the four discourses, and ultimately reflect on what constitutes real change.

Notably, Lacan was not a discourse analyst himself – nor was Michel Foucault– therefore there is not a standard way of doing LDA. Notably, one method of LDA is consolidated in (social) psychology scholarship, where Parker (2005; 2010) outlines seven theoretical elements to analyse a "text" from the perspective of the analyst. Some of these elements, such as the formal qualities of the text, the anchor of representation and the role of knowledge (Parker 2010, 167-72) as the visible patterns of discourse, can also constitute the starting point for a LDA in IR. However, any comparison or equation between the clinical context and the international politics realm is misleading. More to the point, using a LDA into a policy setting with policy and societal actors differs from a clinical context insofar as the researcher is not an analyst strictly speaking and the societal actors observed and interviewed are not analysands. Rather, although in a political and empirical research context the entry point for analysis is the "enunciating act" as much as in a clinical context, when we focus on "who utters the sentence" and interview and observe individuals in their role, we are not trying to psychoanalyse them nor are we engaging with a treatment process. In fact, we are interested in hearing the subject qua representative who does not speak their discourse but rather the discourse of the socio-symbolic structure and fiction which sustains our lives. For example, an EU official is expected to utter a sentence in the name of the official policy line of the EU as well from a place, for instance the EU Commission as an institution. Lacan himself makes the example of diplomats who, in their conversation and interactions, are purely representatives and represent something whose signification is beyond the individual: they register what the other person conveys as pure signifiers, not what that man or woman is (Lacan 1998, 220). This is where the four discourses qua historicised social bonds

come into play and enable us to distinguish the LDA used in psychology from a LDA in socio-political research. This conceptualisation can also solve some of the problems related to field access in institutional settings, where a researcher might be denied access to a specific venue as well as to a specific actor or political leader. As "representatives" (Pavón-Cuéllar et al. 2010, 215) of the structure, these subjects all necessarily resort to the same signifying chain which defines them, and which allows them to establish and maintain their societal relationships. Similarly, putting an "end" to the data gathering is often constrained by the fact that the phase of policymaking under observation is often only a snapshot of a wider process that will develop across time and (policy) space. Hence, the researcher is constrained by real time access to the field and cannot rely on a time-indefinite path between analysand and analyst aiming for a revolution of discourse. Finally, as for Lacan there is no metalanguage through which to explain language objectively, the researcher too never steps outside of discourse. Observing an event, reading a text or listening to someone speaking and being interviewed inevitably triggers a process of identification with language in the very same attempt to make it meaningful (Neill 2013). Thus, every act, move, word that comes from the researcher is an act, move, word in discourse and these are all types of "intervention" on the data that cannot be avoided. This is true when referring to the data collection process, such as during an interview, but this is especially the case of the a-posteriori analysis following data collection. By taking these differences into account, I will now explain how researchers can interpret the policy landscape they might observe and how they can cope with the apparently fragmented set of data they might collect within the framework provided by a LDA.

The fieldwork experience: encounters with the social link and the subject representative. With the "enunciating act" in mind, speaking of a Lacanian discourse analysis does not merely apply to the data analysis, but also includes the process of data collection and the researcher's ethnographic immersion into the field. To detect the enunciators, the researcher needs to find a site or multiple sites of observations. In-site direct observations (Smit and Onwuegbuzie 2018) allow the researcher to directly investigate how a policy object is thought and constituted – i.e., in the form of negotiations, consultations, working sessions, or even day-to day practices. The observable policy landscape should be interpreted as a manifestation of the social link insofar as it introduces the researcher to the presupposed set of societal relations – what needs to be done in the pursuit of a given policy objective. In the context of the EU's climate change action, the discursive practices that make up the climate policy landscape – which include the activities of EU representatives inside and outside the European headquarters – are instances of how different climate agents mobilise their presupposed knowledge apparatus of target setting, modelling, production of policy document or legislation, technology

development, new “greener” jobs, that is what is (pre)supposed to be done to build a robust climate action. This multi-institution, multi-stakeholder and multi-level structure can only be maintained through the speaking subjects, who can be split between the realisation of their climate objectives as a form of ultimate full representation but are at the same time caught in the powerful linguistic structures defining them and determining the climate relations available to them. These differently fraught subjectivities can be the EU officials themselves as employees caught in their consensus-seeking practices as well as the stakeholders such as business actors, trade unions, social movements, NGOs who negotiate and lobby their different targets.

The fieldwork experience makes it possible to go beyond the (textual) surface of a drafted policy document and observe the moment of the enunciation, where we encounter the subject as a (split) representative of the structure, yet not completely overdetermined by this structure. In other words, observing the moment of the enunciation means exposing oneself not merely to the Symbolic – the socio-linguistic structure – but also to the Real of discourse – the surplus-lack produced by symbolisation. Conducting participant observations at an UN international negotiation, or at an EU stakeholder consultation, for instance, is a practice that fits into a policymaking process, and this means observing concrete manifestations of discourse beyond the researcher’s control, and in which the s/he accepts to be involved as a passive, although not neutral, observer. Unlike participant observations, the enunciating acts retrieved through interviews is an ad hoc situation created by the researcher. Consequently, in an interview context, there is a greater freedom to structurally introduce elements of disturbance in discourse (Lacan 2007, 35) but interviewing also involves deeper interference by the researcher who gives inputs even by simply acting as a facilitator in the ongoing dialogue. For this purpose, in-depth interviews, both semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Brinkmann 2013; Wengraf 2001), constitute useful tools to observe how the subjects resort to the shared socio-symbolic structure as well as observe the effects of the structure – the Real. These are visible in the weaknesses and blind spots that make discourse partial and inconsistent, as these are the breaking points of discourse in which the process of identification with language, perpetrated by the subject, fails. Considering the diversity of actors and their assumed different degree of engagement displayed during an interview, the approach to the interview should be varied and most often adjusted as the interview unfolds. For example, the researcher can divide the interview into a procedural section in which they would investigate the role of that representative followed by a second part that would address policy specific content. On a general basis, the procedural part sets the tone for the unfolding metonymic signifying chain, in that the policy content answers are more likely to be affected by the role that specific individual covered. For example, a representative in the EU Commission’s department for energy affairs deals with energy-related products and is unlikely to

deploy a chain involving biodiversity, or water pollution when speaking about their role. Hence, we can then tailor the subsequent policy-related questions based on the produced language associations. This makes it possible to observe the effects of the linguistic structure, that is the Real, on the subjects. Whenever the researcher detects a contradiction during the interview, they can ask a question or give an input that would either follow the logic of the produced signifying structure or they can alternatively introduce a potentially challenging element to observe the effects on the speaking subject. It means that the research would adopt the perspective of the Hysteric (or the Analyst) and challenge the authority of the "Master", the command of discourse. If the researcher alternatively seconds the logic of the hegemonic knowledge produced in the speaking activity of the interview, they adopt instead the perspective of the University discourse and observe the effects of that structure on the speaking subjects. The data collection toolbox can also be complemented by "netnography" (Kozinets 2015), a term borrowed from Marketing research which refers to the deployment of the tools provided by the Internet in social science research. It can be composed of archival data to establish a historical and cultural baseline (Kozinets 2015, 165-70) or any referenced official policy documents can be scrutinised for context or accuracy of information. It can also refer to any Web-mediated content and textual representation, including speeches, government records, announcements, video and minutes of sessions.

Data analysis in LDA: of authority, disavowal and fractures. The aim of a LDA is to reveal the unintended effects of language on the speaking subjects, which means exposing the Real via accessing the Symbolic. In a political situation, this modus operandi involves taking a seemingly closed discourse of "knowledge" collected in a policy field and observing the produced signifying patterns via the "enunciating acts". This exercise makes it possible to reveal the ever-partial character of the discourse, that is detect any fractures in discourse and reflect on their transformative character depending on how these are handled.

In line with Lacan's prioritisation of the signifier as micro "unit" of analysis and in conjunction with Lacan's four social bonds as theoretical guidelines, we start engaging with the network of the collected enunciating acts and engage with what Parker called the mapping of the Symbolic (Parker 2005; 2010), the shared and presumed socio linguistic network which is the part of the discourse that is visible to everyone and without which we would be unable to expose the Real. This consists of looking at how the battery of signifiers metonymically unfolds, and how signifiers are bound together through equivalence and differentiation, words and phrases, associations and structures. This is not an exercise per se. In fact, by bearing in mind the opposition between the University discourse and the Hysteric's discourse, the parallel between the University discourse and the Capitalist discourse as

well as the transformative Analyst discourse as ultimate aim of (discourse) analysis, we trace the presumed knowledge (S2) in which our subjects are caught and which they put to work in the pursuit of a policy objective. Within this framework, the Master Signifier (S1) can be recognised in the text as that "special word" in function of which knowledge is put to work and a seemingly consistent discourse is produced.[7] The example of climate action illustrates that in the pursuit of climate change mitigation objectives, the starting point of the analysis becomes the battery of signifiers which metonymically bounds together signifiers *climate change*, *mitigation, ambition, efficiency, renewables*, *targets, scenarios* as these determine a set of real-life societal relations. This chain composes the shared climate knowledge through which we understand and approach climate problems, via the anchoring function of the Master Signifier (S1) in representation, which gives the illusion of a seemingly consistent and readable reality. For example, it is possible to establish if climate "mitigation" is the dominant signifier that commands and sets the overall direction of the policymaking or, alternatively, if the knowledge it mobilises is in in fact commanded by a different authority. The alleged neutral knowledge the EU promotes when they speak of evidence-based policymaking "*fact-based discussions have been held, knowledge has been exchanged*" (Alejandro Ulzurrun, DG Energy Communication and Interinstitutional relations Head of Unit, 10/07/2018) contrasts in fact with the necessity to preserve the EU competitiveness "*We are here to discuss the EU vision for an economy that is clean and sustainable, more competitive and fit for the twenty-first century*" (Climate and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete[8] 10/07/2018).

Notably, this mapping makes it possible to observe the effects of the structure on the subjects – the Real. This exercise of disruption consists of taking a signifier of choice – usually a recurrent signifier in a policy domain – lining up all the different ways in which this is spoken and looking for any inconsistencies or points in which they reveal their non sensical, partial character. It is precisely the gap or inconsistency detected which is what "cracks" the discourse and represents the meaningless surplus-leftover generated by symbolisation. In sum, this meaningless remainder generated by symbolisation is the only access we have to change via disrupted signification.

Let us return to the case of climate change action. The signifier *energy efficiency* as a presupposition of sense of rational and objective knowledge mobilizes and keeps together a set of socio-political climate relationships between policymakers, industry and citizens as end-users around delivering emissions reductions. A LDA enables us to see that a seemingly closed discourse is in fact open and fractured: the split subject arising from the signifier can be detected in all the different and

[7] It is impossible to know the speaker's individual single mental representation – his/her own Imaginary (Pavón Cuéllar et al. 2010, 2-7; Neill 2013, 339).

[8] Miguel Arias Cañete was the former Commissioner under the Jean Claude Juncker Commission. The new Commissioner under President Ursula Von der Leyen is Frans Timmermans.

inconsistent forms and shapes that a given signifier under analysis take in the enunciation. For example, at different times of the enunciation *energy efficiency* is spoken in different ways which are not always consistent with one another. These include: *energy efficiency* as standard measurement as the ratio between energy input-products output; *energy efficiency* as a metaphor for technology itself[9] "*A wide variety of technologies are necessary to meet goals, with energy efficiency and renewables playing lead roles"*[10] (IEA, David Turk, Acting Director, Sustainability, Technology and Outlooks 10/07/2018); *energy efficiency* as a metaphor for a EU legislative act, the Energy Efficiency Directive (Energy Efficiency Directive (EU)2018/2002); *energy efficiency* as economic savings "*Energy efficiency is not only about CO2 emissions, but also about savings. It makes sense in the economic sense* (EU Commission, DG Energy Interviewee, 13/11/2018)". This way the discourse of knowledge as represented by *energy efficiency* results partial, and its full meaning is deferred across the signifying chain. The inconsistencies and gaps that might result from an empirical analysis of the enunciating acts are an effect of the surplus-loss of signification produced in the enunciation.

Once these fractures are exposed, we can interrogate how lack is handled by referring to Lacan's four conceptual apparatuses and assess whether these fractures can at least shake the foundations of that discourse and leave room for alternative significations and ultimately a new transformative discourse. Alternatively, lack is neutralised and integrated within the dominant type of signification, by being turned into commodified knowledge and consumption objects, an example of how the subject enjoys these processes (*jouissance*). For example, the auspicial "surplus-energy" generated by efficiency measures as knowledge at work can create energy savings. However, if these savings are re-invested and re-absorbed in the market and infrastructures – the so-called rebound effect – they do not translate into a decrease of the absolute volumes of energy, leading to consequent negligible effects on GHG emissions reductions. The alleged objective and rational knowledge represented by *energy efficiency* would then translate into an apparent new reassuring vicious circles which carries the painful pleasure of seemingly saving energy. This manifests as a need to resort to more sophisticated modelling, greater bureaucratic organisation and coordination at all levels of climate governance; it also manifests as a need to produce and consume more efficiently through efficient buildings, effective heating and cooling systems, efficient cars, efficient industrial processes. Yet, the subject is trapped in a circle of endless (dis)satisfaction of knowledge and objects' consumption – *jouissance* – which does not necessarily bring the real transformation and where the pursuit of the desired climate objectives pursue is always deferred. More importantly, the impossibility of "energy savings" qua

[9] IEA's Acting Director, Sustainability, Technology and Outlooks, during the Session "Cost efficient ways for achieving decarbonization", at the EU stakeholder consultation "The EU vision for a clean, modern and competitive economy" held at Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) on 10/07/2018.

[10] The other items in the list being Fuel switching, Nuclear, CCS.

"surplus value" would equate in this case with Lacan's surplus-*jouissance*, as the traumatic points of signification would be positively integrated into the status quo signification and their transformative potential would then be neutralised. On a more positive note, the researcher can search for any forces that, by introducing elements of disturbance in signification, attempt to question the hegemonic discourse. For example, within the same case of the EU's climate mitigation action, we could investigate to what extent the potentially disruptive character of the metaphor of "circularity" in *circular economy* – which embeds issues of metabolism, complexity and interrelation (Ellen McArthur Foundation 2021) – or the new RePower the EU as a bid to save energy by reducing fossil fuel imports from Russia are able to "hystericize", that is traumatically disrupt, or at least challenge, a hegemonic discourse.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I demonstrated that discourse analysis has not exhausted its analytical power in IR and developed a Lacanian discourse analysis as one possible methodology helping researchers identify the mechanisms regulating stability and change. Within an ontological foundation of mutual presupposition, discourse constitutes an overarching socio-linguistic structure that allows the speaking beings to establish and maintain their intersubjective societal relations. Likewise, the subject presupposes this structure and inevitably resort to language to create sense, but the speaking activity creates an excess of meaning, perceived as a loss in the enunciation, as the socio-linguistic order can never fully complete the subject. It is because of this ontological residue of signification – exemplified by *objet petit a* qua lack that stimulates desire and its associated *jouissance* qua paradoxical (dis)satisfaction – that full signification is always deferred. In the data collection and analysis, the researcher is supported by the theoretical guidelines provided by the four discourses: these conceptual apparatuses make it possible to investigate, challenge and potentially subvert the historicised dominant knowledge and its authority.

The paper then demonstrated the potential of LDA as an empirical method of investigation through the case of climate change mitigation action in the EU. Based on the attributes of "the enunciating act", the field is conceptualised as the place where the moment of the enunciation – the socio-symbolic and the excess-leftover of sense qua Lacanian subject – can be investigated through traditional ethnographic methods of data collection, such as participant observations and interviews. The EU's policymaking process manifests itself as a multi-institution, multi-stakeholder and multi-level process, which includes the everyday practices of how EU officials work in their offices and interact with actors inside and outside their headquarters. Any outcomes of these interactions as well

as the interactions themselves are the societal climate relations made possible by an overarching socio-linguistic structure, "what needs to be done" to maintain given climate policies. At the same time the EU representatives, their stakeholders or even the citizens as Lacanian subjects are the (split) speaking beings that, in the pursuit of given climate objectives, are caught in a signifying machine determining the climate relations available to them.

Briefly exemplified by the case of *energy efficiency* as the embodiment of an alleged rational and measurable climate mitigation knowledge, the potential for a LDA is revealed when the researcher opens and disrupt a seemingly closed and consistent discourse. The researcher can trace the mobilised knowledge (S2), detect any anchor of representation (S1), and assess whether such authority is disavowed, acknowledged, challenged and potentially subverted, based on how the excess of meaning produced by the subjects – evident in gaps, weaknesses and contradictions – is handled.

A LDA is in line with available discursive approaches that stress the discursive attributes of power-knowledge relationships. Yet, a LDA emphasises the unintentional coping mechanisms of the subject. The dialectical perspective between discourse and subject implies a shift away from the common understanding of discourses and related counter-discourses as full "storylines" (Hajer, 1995; Epstein 2008; Leipold et al., 2019), and from the idea of misunderstandings as different interpretations that societal actors actively exploit to influence the definition of an issue by imposing a given frame (Litfin 1994; Hajer, 1995;). Rather, a LDA pushes these arguments in a more critical direction. It does not consider a social phenomenon or a policy tool as synonym for "narratives" or "storytelling", but as the formalisation of a social link. As sketched out in the case of *energy efficiency*, each spoken signifier at different times of the enunciation gives origin to different but always partial storylines of "efficiency". These storylines are not "competing" but coexist, together with their inconsistencies, in giving meaning to the signifier because of a residue of signification produced during the enunciation.

To conclude, a LDA is one possible methodological framework in IR insofar as it helps display and leverage on the *unintended* effects of the signifying chain on the speaking subjects – of which the subject is not even aware – as a means of explaining stability and change. This way this contribution is not limited to the subfield of poststructuralism but also integrates or competes with other debates preoccupied with the constitution of agency and with mechanisms of change in international politics.

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