

## October Seminar 2020

### NIDA LACAN STUDY AND READING GROUP

*Due to Coronavirus restrictions, we will continue our seminars online until further notice. I will send members copies of the texts of the monthly seminars. New members, please contact us by the email: [Ehsan.Azari@nida.edu.au](mailto:Ehsan.Azari@nida.edu.au)*

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## Desire lies Behind the Mask of Symptom

### Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious (XII)

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Lacan opens the session by exploring the unconscious and all pathways that lead us to see its work in practical terms. Lacan corrects the translation of the title of one of Freud's articles from 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' to analysis 'finite and infinite,' where Freud answers the question of the duration of the analytical process. Freud prefers the aim of the analysis open-ended and the contents of the process as concrete as possible. He postulates that at the foundation of what is irreducible in a male subject in the castration complex and *penisnied* in a female subject is always the phallus. Freud's discovery in this was precisely the aim of desire in every symptom or dream—that seemed until his time an everyday phenomenon. In dreams, he sees the fulfillment of a desire, *Wunscherfüllung*—wish fulfillment. Freud also thought that the symptom also implied satisfaction of a desire but a failed satisfaction that Lacan calls "satisfaction turned upside down," (Lacan, 2017, 301). That means that desire is related to something that is undoubtedly its 'mask.' In analytic experience, desire shows itself in a close association with that which veils it. Therefore the veil that covers desire matters in the analysis as a problem that needs focus. During the analytic experience, desire surfaces in the consciousness in a paradoxical way as the enjoyment of desiring itself, not a particular desire.

Several times recently, I have emphasized the way desire, insofar as it appears in consciousness, manifests itself in a paradoxical form in analytic experience—or, more precisely, how much the latter has promoted this characteristic inherent in desire qua perverse desire, which is a second-order desire, an enjoyment of desire qua desire. (Ibid)

Most often than not, desire does not make its presence in analysis to detect its relation to the object that satisfies the desire in a simple way. We may well detect desire from the position that the subject upholds about the object, which always shows an indirect relation. Due to its intangible feature, desire always sustains itself unfathomably. Finding a fixed meaning and a known object of desire is like catching a tiger by the tail. The analytic experience demonstrates that the ego is at a loss when putting a desire in any rational articulation. Since it is the subject of the unconscious that is desiring, we need to explore the meaning of desire through many desires. We can only draw a framework from the analysis by which the subject's position as a 'living being' gives a glimpse of desire.

Moreover, Lacan is allied with Spinoza to describe desire as the living being's aim and end. For Spinoza, the desire was the essence of man. This fact shows itself through the mediators through which desire reveals itself.

Behind this phenomenological diversity, behind the contradiction, the anomaly and the aporia of desire, it's certain, moreover, that there exists a deeper relationship, which is the subject's relationship to life and, as one says, to instincts. By taking this approach, analysis helps us make progress on the subject's situation in relation to his position as a living being. (301-302)

Lacan preferred desire as an equivalent in English for German *Wunsch* and saw its translation into *wish* as a flaw in Freud's standard translation by James Starchy. Freud defines desire in teleological terms as the final aim of life beyond the pleasure principle that ends up in a rest state brought about by death. The analytic experience is a guide for psychoanalysis to see the path of the fulfillment of desire. What in desire is often visible is the subject's desire to relate to the Other's desire. That is what Hegel reveals in his philosophical research in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel's discoveries in this regard strengthen the Freudian theory of desire. Hegel premises his study based on the intermediate link between "self-consciousness with the constitution of self-consciousness in the other," (302). However, Hegel sees the dialectic of desire by examining the elusive synthesis. Freudian path to this is contrary where Freud allies himself with Hegel in that the unconscious desire is tied with a relationship with the other. Lacan refers to the role of experience of Freud himself as a human being in his discovery, something that was non-existent in the experience of Hegel as a philosopher and as a human being—seeing the work of desire within himself as a human being, which enabled him to see desire beyond its veil. That is an essential gap in the philosophical discourse that undermines the philosophers' desire as human beings. As a psychoanalyst, Freud was privileged to observe desire by analyzing his patients' symptoms within his dreams.

Nevertheless, his research also had a flip side. During Freud's time, there was not enough knowledge in some areas, such as the psychology of hysteria, that made Freud come to some flawed conclusions in his case history Dora. However, his interpretation was of great importance in resolving the question of a symptom. In interpretation, it is also significant that an analyst must also focus upon what remains unsaid in the analysand's discourse. On the background of this unsaid, an analyst could be able to reach to exciting truth. Besides, in the time of Freud, there were different universal cultural paradigms for all to observe. For example, when Dora was in analysis, Freud told her that she is in love with Herr K. This was out of the question because Dora was a homoerotic and was actually in love with Frau K. The interpretation was therefore gone unsavoury because the analyst would correct the analysand by imposing on her his own judgment on how to live her life. In today's psychiatry, the conditions are different. In our day and age, a patient comes for analysis and freely talks about his/her ways of *jouissance*, which are culturally normative. The analysts do have the knowledge and skills that are not available for the patient. They also employ their personal experience to understand their patients' backgrounds better and manage the treatment course.

To return to the symptom, one must bear in mind that the symptom is multi-layered, always masked, and full of paradoxes wherein everything is analyzable. Lacan presents the case of Elisabeth von R., one of Freud's first hysteric patients. She presented herself as different from what she was. She was for a lengthy period caring for her ill father but always thinking about something unfathomable—desire—that tied her up with her childhood friend whom she was going to marry. Something else also occupied her mind, which was her relationship with "the espouses of her two sisters," (304). One of them she hated for his rudeness, and the second one, very 'seductive.' Her situation deteriorates when some unpleasant things take place between herself and her brother-in-law and one of her sisters. After observing Elisabeth's symptoms, Freud told her that she is in love with his brother-in-law and the pain in her leg is the sign of this

repressed desire. That is something that Freud told Dora that she was in love with Herr K. the emergence of the hysteric symptom in Elisabeth were related to her tough job of caring and nursing for a sick person, and more so her problems were heftier for she was caring for someone close to her, her father. As such, she satisfies the demand, and all her dedication and even rejection of this demand play a hysterogenic [inducing hysteria] role. That is what Freud saw in the patient's symptoms. Freud's examination of this patient's personal and family history was not in-depth, but he emphasized the importance of the 'hysterogenic situation.' Lacan stresses that the function of demand is related to the interest that the subject seeks in a situation of desire. Lacan recalls his third formula of desire in the previous session as an account of this function.

$$D \rightarrow A \leftrightarrow d \rightleftharpoons s(A) \leftarrow I$$

According to Lacan, Freud has made a mistake about the subject's orientation prematurely by language that draws his patient into the situation of desire. The knowledge we have now of the hysterics, their identification, goes in multiple directions. It means that Elisabeth is interested in a situation of desire, and this shines through her symptom—this brings about that a mask is needed to cover the reality behind a symptom. Elisabeth's identification goes in two directions.

This would effectively already imply that she takes one side or another—that she is interested in her brother-in-law from the perspective of her sister or in her sister from the perspective of her brother-in-law.” (306).

What covers the symptom under its mask is a desire, which in any case reveals itself in a net of ambiguities where the subject finds itself trapped and his relationship with the object is also remains indefinite. That is a situation the subject wants it, and the symptom expresses it in its confusing way that Lacan calls “a mask in a symptom,” (Ibid). It is the reason that the first thing Freud says about symptoms is that they speak for themselves. He goes further than every physical sign in the patients. For instance, his ‘stomach noises’ have the significance of words, and every time the patient appears in the consulting room, his/her situation began to deteriorate. Even the patient's tone and gesture speak as signs of the patient's discourse during the analysis. Each of these signs has expository value. In other words, each element in the patient's verbal or non-verbal communication functions as a ‘centripetal’ trace of desire. The dream also reveals direction to the epicentre of the symptom and the unconscious desire. The linkage of a dream to desire functions as a mask and what Lacan calls ‘an x, an enigma.’ The symptom unfolds the recognition of a desire in its mask. It is tough to find a key to what part of the mask calls for recognition.

Nevertheless, this revelation is made in such a way that it remains shielded from another. It is addressed to nobody because no one can recognize it. The desire which wants recognition is a repressed desire.

It's for this reason that our intervention adds something more to a simple reading. It's a desire that the subject excludes insofar as he wants it to be recognized. As a desire for recognition, it's perhaps a desire, but, at the end of the day, it's a desire for nothing. It's a desire that is not there, a rejected, excluded desire. (307)

Lacan emphasizes that the dual nature of the unconscious desire acknowledged in the mask implies that it is not directed to a specific object. Lacan argues that this is because of what Freud coined as *Erniedrigung*—the debasement in love life refers to the impotence in love relation. It happens to some people that despite intensive sensual affection, one is unable to engage in

sexual intercourse. Lacan sees the root of this impotence in “the depth of the Oedipus complex,” 308). The patient is deep down engaged unconsciously with the mother’s desire (an incestuous object) that prevents him from engaging fully in love with someone. Such a problem remains within a normal subject. That for Lacan was nothing but an unconscious fixation with the mother, as he says, “these are cases I which Freud presents to us the dissociation of love and desire...Freud tells us, these subjects get their pleasure from prostitutes,” (308). Perhaps one of them was Samuel Beckett, whose biography suggests that he has had real excitement only with prostitutes. Beckett also reveals such bonds between Murphy’s passionate love Celia, a prostitute in his novel *Murphy*.

In fact Beckett, like Western civilization itself, was deeply split between the ideal and the real, a split which had been widened by masturbation and would be acknowledged as well as symbolized by occasional recourse to whores. (Cronin, 1996. 106)

Lacan argues that what the subject wants from a prostitute is the phallus—as the marker of desire—as, in ancient Rome, the phallus was sculpted at the brothels’ entrance. Such a mark also identifies the signifier—the phallus. By definition, desire is for the lack, which turns into another desire in the Other. That is what the second formula of desire above demonstrates.

About his critics who blamed him for his insistence on the language, Lacan contends that he does not want to ignore what remains unformulated in his theory. On the contrary, he insists that despite its inarticulable nature, desire is an articulation, “the fact that desire is not articulable is no reason for its not being articulated,” (Lacan, 2017, 310). The articulation of desire is possible insofar as we examine it in relation to the signifiers’ presence therein. Notwithstanding such a link with the signifiers, strictly speaking, desire is not fully inarticulable.

Desire can be articulated in the demand as we approach it in one or the other demand. When the patient contacts a psychoanalyst to see him/her, he has a demand, and when the analyst opens the door of the consulting room and says to him that he will be listening, he is involved in the circumstance of desire.

Demand is constituted in language because it has a place in language. For example, a request or appeal provides grounds for both presence and absence as Freud’s *fort/da* designates. Lacan contends that this game is already at work in the demand. The object that appeals points at is no more a tangible object. When it finds itself in demand, it becomes a symbol-object. This symbol-object is the one that the desire necessitates its presence. The object is also not specified as a body part, breast, or anything else only as it is considered overbearing in Gestalt psychology as Lacan stipulates.

The baby at the breast is well aware that the breast extends to the armpit, neck and hair. The object in question is the symbolic parenthesis of presence, inside of which is the sum of all the objects it can bring. The symbolic parenthesis is already more precious than any good. None of the goods it contains are capable by themselves of satisfying the appeal of presence. (311)

None of the body parts concerning the maternal body can satisfy desire, but each plays a role as “a substitute, crushing of desire,” (Ibid). The mask that is worn by each object is responsible for any ambiguity. As experience shows, a child gets excited as he sees someone showing and then removing his mask. Children often laugh when they see this, but they get annoyed if another mask appears beneath the first mask. That is a common reaction that we do not need to try the experience. In one month after birth, the child’s means of communication is laughter as a sign

for the presence as Lacan states, “the physiological mechanism of laughter is always linked to smiling, relaxation and a level of satisfaction.” (312) This smile and laughter are also a way to satisfy the child’s desire. Since desire is related to the signifier of presence, the first laughter is beyond all the demand. It is addressed to the subject behind it. That also shows the child’s identification first with the mother and then with the father during infantile development. Lacan further clarifies that laughter is part of the communication, as it reveals satisfaction, whereas tears are not its opposite but an expression. The one who satisfies desire is the one who is in the position of power.

Lacan, in a densely theoretical account, wants to describe this further. Once demand reaches its destination without a mask, it implies not satisfaction but a message of presence. Recognizing that the subject is in the presence of the best objects grows laughter. When the demand is rejected, then the child scowls as a response to this rejection. At this moment, the origin of the need and desire reveals themselves in a transformed way.

The scowl gets transferred into the circuit and ends up here [ $i(a)$ ], the place where it’s not for nothing that we encounter the other’s image. What is known as the ego-ideal is produced at the conclusion of this transformation of demand. However, on the signifying line, the principle of what is called prohibition and superego, articulated as coming from the Other, emerges. (313)

Lacan redraws his graph of desire here [for copyright reason, I cannot reproduce the graph on page 313 of the *Seminar V: Formation of the Unconscious*]. In a nutshell, what Lacan means is this: when the demand makes the encounter with the primordial object’s presence, it causes laughter in his face, which speaks of satisfaction. By contrast, when this demand is refused, a scowl emerges on a child’s face, which turns into a circuit that ends up in the place of  $i(a)$ , which is the other image or ideal-ego. After the transformation of the demand, the ego-ideal is produced. That means that the message about prevention arrives from the Other. Lacan admits that it is always hard to see in the analysis “the existence, coexistence, the co-dimensionality of the ego-ideal and the superego” (Ibid), for they are different productions. Still, it is possible to demonstrate the division between the need and the word that expresses it. The need and the word show that they are ‘different’ and ‘co-dimensional.’ The superego emerges when the signifiers are articulated with the prohibition, allowing for the transformation of desire from where the ego-ideal arises. It is the refused demands that help the creation of the masks. The subject will find himself as a subject after the arrival of the third party with its inhibition. It will then begin desire in the subject, which Lacan says is ‘alloerotic’ not ‘autoerotic.’ With the desire, the subject will also have its various masks. That also inaugurates the emergence of the privileged signifier—the phallus. In the end, the desire will separate itself from the mask.

In sum, what is essential in the *Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious* is not the Oedipus complex per se. Firstly, Lacan is mostly silent about this concept in his late seminars, and secondly, this concept is likely to vanish with a Freudian dynamic perspective after Lacan in psychoanalysis. The important thing that we learned in this seminar is the unconscious formations and its discursive context. This session is opened by demonstrating desire and all that what makes it an unconscious desire. Lacan returns to Freud to discover the traces of desire in dreams and symptoms and their links with the Oedipus complex and castration.

Nonetheless, he sees Freudian wish-fulfillment as fulfilling an everyday desire in dreams and the mask of an unsatisfied desire in symptoms. In the discourse of the analysand, the analyst finds the subject’s enjoyment of the desiring itself. It is impossible to distinguish desire from the

object because the subject does not know what he/she desires and what real object is at issue in there.

### Notes:

Cronin, Anthony, 1996, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, Flamingo: An imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, London.

Lacan, Jacques, 2017, *Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious*, tr. Russell Grigg, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Polity Press, Cambridge.