

## January Seminar 2021

### 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 is the Inevitable and Unconditional in Demand

### *The Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious XV*

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Lacan begins the session by spelling out the fundamental formative, and normative functions of heterosexuality in the emergence of subjectivity insofar as the conceptualization of desire is concerned. This relationship in heterosexuality makes the structure that evolves from the tension between parents and the child. However, the shape of this relationship presents itself to the subject always unstable. Lacan refers to the Hungarian psychoanalyst Michael Balint who saw a fault in developing the relationship between the child, mother, and father that evolves in the oedipal drama. The idea that a split between desire and what he calls ‘tenderness’ appears in the above three-partite relationships. He defines ‘tenderness’ as frustration, immaturity, and weakness. The combination of desire and tenderness— that Lacan specifies as two ‘currents’— that evolves from a combination of the opposite pregenital tendencies and cultural needs. Lacan emphasizes that the question of a heterosexual relationship is contingent upon this combination. About a recent lecture by the French psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto, Lacan notes her idea about the beautiful and good concerning the phallus’s visual implication in human culture. According to Lacan, this idea is not supported by what he sees in the primitive tribes’ ethnographical and anthropological studies. For example, some tribes, Amazonian Nambikwara in Brazil, as Levi Strauss writes, disregard the concealment of a male organ’s visibility in public. Freud’s observations and experience also present another view about the meaning of the phallus. Lacan describes the phallus not as a form or object but as the signifier of desire with various functions as far as subjectivity is concerned. It is the signifier of desire, and the desire itself is not sexual attraction, instinct, or intersexual appetite. Desire is also not in the analytical experience a self-evident reality. However, desire is often marked by the phallus as a signifier.

The phallus is not a form. It doesn’t have the form of an object, insofar as a form remains a captivating and fascinating form—at least not in one sense, for the problem remains intact in the other...the phallus is neither a fantasy, nor an image, nor an object, not even a part object, not even an internal one. It’s a signifier. It’s solely the fact that it is a signifier that makes it possible to conceptualize and articulate the diverse functions it assumes at different levels of the intersexual encounter. (352-353)

With these remarks, Lacan returns to Freud’s magnum opus, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which Lacan terms miraculous. He calls it miraculous probably for Freud’s stress on the function of the day residue that sometimes Lacan calls the desire of the day in the determination of a dream. The dream of the butcher’s beautiful wife was such a dream in which Lacan examined the dialectic of the demand and desire in which Freud examined the persistence of an unsatisfied

desire. That is the characteristic of the dream that Lacan was most attracted to. Lacan notes that the dream occurred to the butcher's wife because she was just asked the day before by a friend to come for dinner to her place. This invitation has played the role of the day residue.

Lacan selects a dream by Freud's hysteric patient from the chapter entitled "Material and Source of Dreams." [SE:4: 183] The dream was as follows:

An intelligent and cultivated young woman, reserved and undemonstrative in her behaviour, reported as follows: *I dreamt that I arrived too late at the market and could get nothing either from the butcher or from the woman who sells vegetables.*[1] An innocent dream. No doubt: but dreams are not as simple as that, so I asked to be told it in greater detail. She thereupon gave me the following account. *She dreamt she was going to the market with her cook, who was carrying the basket. After she has asked for something, the butcher said to her: 'That's not obtainable any longer,' and offered her something else, adding 'This is good too.' She rejected it and went on to the woman who sells vegetables, who tried to get her to buy a peculiar vegetable that was tied up in bundles but was of a black colour. She said: 'I don't recognize that; I won't take it.'* [2](354-355)

The above dream is one of several dreams that Freud select in Chapter Five, "Material and Sources of Dreams," that he terms 'innocent' dreams in which he saw the specific role of the experiential event of the previous day or the 'day residue.' Freud identifies the first account of the dream [1] as innocent and simple. Freud asks the patient to give a further account of the dream of the dream cannot be as simple. The 'day's residue' is the statement [1] she has gone late to the marketplace where she does not find meat or vegetables. The direct speech in the dream when the butcher says to her 'that is not obtainable any longer' is a result of the transference, for as Freud writes, it was his own statement the day before that he told his patient that the childhood experiences were not 'obtainable any longer' that he told the patient earlier days. Freud continues to deconstruct the linguistic structure of the dream further:

So I was the butcher and she was rejecting these transferences into the present of old habits of thinking and feeling. —What, again, was the origin of her own remark in the dream 'I don't recognize that; I won't take it'? For the purpose of the analysis, this had to be divided up. 'I don't recognize that' was something she had said the day before to her cook, with whom she had had a dispute; but at the time, she had gone on: 'Behave yourself properly!' At this point there had clearly been a displacement. Of the two phrases that she has used in the dispute with her cook, she had chosen the insignificant one for inclusion in the dream: Those would have been the appropriate words to use if someone had ventured to make improper suggestions and had forgotten to close his meat shop. (Freud, 1991, 271-272)

Another point that Freud adds in his analysis is the inclusion of the vegetable-seller in the dream, especially a vegetable that is bundled and black in colour that is interpreted as "a dream combination of asparagus and black (Spanish) radishes." (272) Freud avoids saying anything about the symbolic values of the vegetables, for it is obvious. However, in a footnote, he attributed the dream to a patient's veiled fantasy about his own sexual conduct and her defiance. He stresses that such fantasy inscribes itself as a delusion in the hysteric consciousness that reemerges in dreams. It is not accidental that psychiatrists find themselves in their treatment of hysteric patients. Freud concludes that he observed delusional fantasies while treating other hysteric patients interested in repeating the traumatic experience and sexual assault in childhood.

Now let us turn to what Lacan makes of this dream in his seminar. He draws the following inferences from the dream and Freud's interpretation:

1. Lacan contends that Freud allows the existence of the day residue as an inevitable element in his theory of dreams that often function as a triggering cause for the emergence of a dream.
2. Lacan sees the butcher's shop and Freud's own presence in the dream and related it to the Viennese slang, a vulgar way of saying you have forgotten to button up your pant. The patient avoids saying that herself, which is what she wants to say in the analysis. One might add the patient's threatening of her cook, '*Behave yourself properly,*' was an additional indication of Freud's assertion about his patient's defiance fantasy.
3. Lacan highlights the place and the location—the butcher's shop— as a significant place often within the dream and symptom of a hysteric. A hysteric needs this place as the place of the phallus as a signifier. She rejects this place beyond her demand which is the Other's desire. That is something that Freud leaves for us to stress that the place is mentioned unambiguously. The patient remains hesitating to pose herself as having or being the phallus. Such hesitation reveals that the phallus is not an object, but a signifier of desire as Lacan says, "The dilemma is absolutely essential. It lies at the heart of all the shifts, transmutations and sleights of hand, I would say, of the castration complex," (Lacan, 2017, 357). That is also what, by way of signification Freud's statement, "That's not obtainable anymore," suggests. The phallus presents itself as a lacking object (not obtainable) and a signifier of 'having' or 'being.' She rejects it because it shows a woman's position in hysteria.

As a woman, she makes a mask of herself. She makes a mask of herself precisely so that, behind that mask, she can be the phallus. The entire behaviour of hysterics manifests itself in the gesture of this hand placed on her button—the meaning of which Freud's eye accustomed us to see a long, long time ago—accompanied by this sentence, 'It's not worthwhile.' Why isn't it worthwhile? Because there is, of course, no question of looking further, because further on is where the phallus should be. (359)

From Lacan's comments, it seems that he is bringing everything in the dream to the desire and its signifier phallus. That is what the dream conceals and recreates in terms of fantasy. It is there to be offered to desire and the possibility of getting access to the one who desires. Lacan's persistence on the desire and especially on its signifier phallus frustrates Marcel Marini, who writes in her comments about *Seminar V*.

This absolute primacy of the phallus—the single emblem of Man—has been the real doctrinal basis of Lacanians, who have often turned it into a dogma. Some of the expression are famous: "The phallus is the signifier of signifiers," "the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire," its function "touches on its most profound relation: that in which the Ancients embodied the nous (the Mind) and the Logos (speech, discourse, reason), etc." (Marini, 1992, 168)

Lacan praises someone from the audience who compared his description of desire to Alexander Calder's mobile art, [Calder revolutionized the art of sculpture and painting; instead of portraying his works as a solid mass and weight, they identify its space while moving around. Marcel Duchamp dubbed his art as mobile]. Lacan's desire also defines itself in a dialectic that locates itself in a residue that the need sustains it beyond the demand. The demand in Lacan's words, 'change,' 'transpose' and 'divert' the need and its underlying residue. That residue in each demand points to the existence of a core desire. This residue is a result of the incompatibility between a man's needs and signifiers. In other words, as an implication of the signifiers on the need, desire in its essence, desire appears and insists. Desire makes its existence manifested by

the dialectic of demand. The demand is fundamentally a demand for an unsatisfiable love, articulating itself as a demand for the Other (presents or absent). That is the way that the symbolic order of language and culture put itself in demand. Thus, beyond any need, the demand is located in an unconditionality of demand for love. The demand carries within itself something that is an unretrievable loss in which the need occupies the primary concern, but the real target remains as always as desire in every demand. The demand for love finds itself as desire in a sexual relationship, for involved is always an object and a demand for love. The demand for love represents that unconditionality. As sexual desire would affirm the pure desire is “the subtraction of *drive* from the demand for love: in fact, the drive represents precisely the appetite for satisfaction on the symbolic level.” (Chiesa, 2007, 153)

Involved in demand are two negations. The first negation arises when the signifier cannot accommodate the whole of the need, which entails unconditional love. The second negation arises when the unsatisfied demand for love gives birth to the absolute status of desire.

However, since need has already passed through the filter of demand onto the plane of the unconditioned, it is only in the name of a second negation, as it were, that we encounter there, beyond, the margin that was lost in demand. What we find in this beyond is precisely the feature of absolute condition that is present in desire as such. (Lacan, 2017, 361)

Lacan was mindful of the difficulty with comprehending his fundamental concept of desire that he agrees with a commentator who likened his concept to Cedar’s mobile art. In the first part of *The Seminar XXIII: The Sinthome*, Lacan states that he invented the knot in his topology to illuminate the paradox in teaching his notion of desire. The critical question in each knot is that it endorses multi-layered relationships. Like a keynote in a musical masterpiece, the concept of desire repeats itself in different prospects from the beginning to the end. That is something, as I quoted above, with which some Lacanians find problems. Responding to Chomsky’s conception of an object, Lacan criticizes science, which handles every subject as an object, which disregards the subject’s truth, divided on its own account. What is at stake here is the objectification of the cause rather than the object itself. Defending the analytical discourse, he goes further than, “we don’t believe in the object, but we observe desire, and from this observation of desire we induce the cause as something objectivized.” (Lacan, 2016, 26)

To return to *Seminar V*, Lacan insists on the two axes of need and demand in his investigation of desire. We decipher desire by taking our lead or, as Lacan says from borrowing raw material from need. The raw material implies a particular need with the absolute condition, “one that is without measure and incommensurate with the need for an object of any kind,” (Lacan, 2017, 361). That condition is absolute because it obliterates the Other from the equation.

Every desire in its pure state is something that, uprooted from the soil of needs, assumes the form of an absolute condition in relation to the Other. It’s the margin or result of the subtraction, as it were, of the requirements of need from the demand for love. Conversely, desire presents itself as what, in the demand for love, rebels against being reduced to a need, because in reality, it satisfies nothing other than itself, that is, desire as an absolute condition. (362)

Lacan reminds us that the expression of desire is made only by the signifier that always remains veiled. The veil itself covers the phallus or the signifier in man. That explains why there are more or fewer tendencies to veil woman, the phallus, and the signifier of masculine desire in all cultures. This signifier is veiled, for it is what Lacan calls ‘sweet nothings.’ The signifier, after

all, represents what is veiled is not there; it is always an absence. Thus, the phallus has to be understood as Lacan alludes elsewhere the figure (0), defined as naught and nill but with a vital role to play in mathematics. The phallus is a signifier but not an object or image, that brings balance to all other signifiers in the signifying chain.

I alluded to the veil that quite often covers the phallus in man. It's exactly the same thing that normally covers a woman's being almost entirely, inasmuch as what is precisely there lying behind, and which is veiled, is the signifier phallus. (363)

A case in point for Lacan is a hysterical desire that upholds testimony to Lacan's statements: desire in hysterics shows itself as an unsatisfied desire, and desire is the Other's desire. While Lacan often returns to the hysterical desire, he proceeds in the next session to see the status of desire with the obsessional. Concerning the hysterical desire, Lacan offers a reading of Breuer's *Studies of Hysteria* where he interprets the significant symptoms of the hysterics such as 'dizziness,' 'nausea,' and 'disgust' as an eruption between "optical sensation and motor sensation" (364)

In conclusion, Lacan starts with the marker and signifier of desire—the phallus—before he plunges into the components such as need and demand to spells out his paradoxical conception of desire. By way of illustration, he again borrows other hysterical dreams from Freud's work on dreams. Lacan places the accent on the motivating factor in dreams that Freud called day residue, and Lacan calls it the desire of the day in dreams. In his observation of the dream, Lacan offers the phallus as the signifier that opens the window to the subject's desire. Given the enigmas of desire, he begins by exploring the components of desire, such as need and demand, to portray the links to need, demand, and desire. In this context, Lacan is keen to accept the method he elaborates on the desire to the Calder's mobile art. In this way, desire makes its presence felt by moving around to defines the different spaces it enters from time to time. Like the Oedipus complex, desire, unconscious, and other concepts also emanate retroactively from Freudian *le complexes familiaux*.

## Notes:

Chiesa, Lorenzo, 2007, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

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Lacan, Jacques, (2016), *The Seminar XXIII: The Sinthome*, tr. A R Price, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Polity Press, Massachusetts.

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

Marini, Marcelle, (1992), *Jacques Lacan: The French Context*, tr. Anne Tomiche, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.