

May Seminar 2021

NIDA LACAN STUDY AND READING GROUP

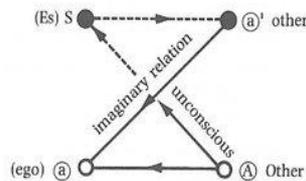
Due to Coronavirus restrictions, we will continue our seminars online until further notice. I will send members copies of the texts of the monthly seminars. New members, please contact us by the email: Ehsan.Azari@nida.edu.au

Lacan Passion with Mathematics and the Question of Female Obsessional

The Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious, XIX

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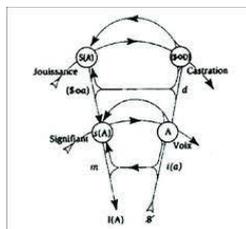
Lacan opens the session with a description of a sign $\langle \rangle$ a lozenge-shaped symbol that he borrowed from mathematic, which is composed of two symbols $<$ (Less than) and $>$ (greater than). In mathematics, the sign is used for showing inequality between two quantitative values. Since both symbols come together, the elements on the two sides of the sign have different quantities. Elsewhere Lacan uses the lozenge for its mathematical meaning. This seminar compares the sign to the schema introduced earlier in the seminar, the schema L , which illustrates the subject and its relation to its centre-ground—the Other (the locus of speech and message). The subject [see below] meets the wall $a-\acute{a}$. The $a-\acute{a}$ vector shows an imaginary relationship between the ego a and the specular image \acute{a} in the mirror stage. The L Schema appears in Lacan's various works. He, in his later works, presents its simplified version.



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When the formula appears as $[\$ \langle \rangle a]$, the subject is in relation with the imaginary semblable (double) or the other with lower o, as Lacan elaborates in the mirror stage. When the formula appears as $[\$ \langle \rangle D]$, the demand (D) occurs as an articulation of the need in the signifier. Lacan later focuses on the complete graph of desire that its different version appears in his later texts.

In the graph, the upper horizontal line $S(A)$ and $[\$ \langle \rangle D]$, which is the signifying chain.



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This signifying chain is at the base of each demand because no signifying articulation can occur without this chain. This chain makes it possible for the symbolic in demand to appear in the real. This possibility gives the power to the demand. For instance, the demand for unconditional love is a demand for presence. That explains the ambiguities of a signifier that signifies

something that doesn't want to say. Hatred and ignorance articulate themselves in the same way as love, for both have a kinship with love as far as the subject is concerned. The formula $S(\bar{A})$ (S with a barred A in the bracket) identifies the lack in the big Other (*Autre*). The bar is the work of the signifier as the formula $s(\bar{A})$ identifies the signified of the barred Other. The structure of each demand contains the message that arrives from the Other in an inverted manner. The message is a signifier that means that the Other is also barred. The upper line in the graph (*jouissance* → *castration*) represents a symbolic signifying articulation that functions as the bedrock of the creation of every demand. On the other hand, this line is expressed as the lower line (signifier → voice), representing a crude imaginary articulation of a chain of signifiers and phonemes.

Let's comment on the upper line, which lies beyond all signifying articulation. This line corresponds to the effect of the signifying articulation taken as a whole, insofar as, through its mere presence, it makes the symbolic appear in the real. It makes this horizon or possibility of demand, this power of demand which is essentially and by nature—place as much ambiguity on that as you like—a demand for love, a demand for presence, appear in its totality and insofar as it's articulated. (Lacan, 2017, 416)

Lacan suggests above that the upper line or the unconscious signifying chain is articulated to signify something beyond all signification. Beyond all signification are love (hatred, ignorance) and presence in every need that appears in the signifying chain as a signifier. At the left side of the upper line, we have the signifier of the barred Other (*Autre*) $S(\bar{A})$. It is also called a message which is a demand that returns from the Other. That, in the meantime, demonstrates what lies behind each demand. This point is homologous (here of the exact origin and anatomy) with the message $s(\bar{A})$ at the left side of the lower line of the graph. This message belongs to the signifier of the Other that goes and returns as a demand from the Other. At the site of the Other, this demand exposes to the locus of the existing codes. Locus of speech is what Lacan calls 'the battery of signifier.' At this stage, this demand comes down to conscious perception. The subject situates himself as a speaking subject of that demand that Lacan formulates in his algebra [$\$ \langle \rangle D$].

In analytical experience, this always happens when the subject situates himself confronted with demand in the background of all new demands. This fundamental demand articulates itself in terms of signifiers 'directly' or 'implicitly' in an analysand's discourse. This implicit manifestation transpires in terms of archaic signifiers that go back to the infantile regression, such as oral and others. In the 'intermediary zone' of an analytical session, the action and verbal expressions, if at all possible, of the analyst comes into play in articulating the analyst's demand at every moment. The analytical law recommends sustenance of the non-satisfaction of each demand made by the analysands. That strategy is devised based on the understanding that the real demand will always remain articulated elsewhere. That does not prevent the analyst from answering the questions of the analysand or comfort in some critical cases. The frustration of the analysand may be visible in the horizon of the demand—the demand for love—which could be demand for something else. Lacan spells out two examples of such a muddled demand: The demand for recognition of his being that the analyst's presence brings about. The analyst denies it for a reason stated above. This denial is like the Hegelian negation. From Hegel, we know the power of negation and suspicion in the dialectical progression that uncovers the contraction in any consciousness. At the outset of the Phenomenology, he stresses the positive features of negation that bring forth the truth behind the untrue consciousness.

But when, on the other hand, the result is conceived as it is in truth, namely, as a *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation, the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself.” (Hegel, 1977, 50)

A determinate negation for Hegel was the positive and constructive nature of the conceptual progress. That means that different guises of negations cause the habitual in the consciousness (here of the analysand) discarded. As a consequence, it allows the emergence of dialectical progress. The progress also makes the untrue consciousness face its limits, which are the creations of the same consciousness. That allows the consciousness to move beyond its own limit. The consciousness will find itself caught between the truth beyond the untruthful consciousness, which will bring anxiety and suffering to the subject. In his theories and analytical practice, Lacan often discovers and draws on the hidden psychological narrative within Hegelian philosophical discourse. Here, he spells out the power of negation by the analyst who brings the untrue demands to the archaic demand of the subject, which is the demand for love and presence. Like philosophical speculation in Hegel, negation gets the subject in touch with his unconscious desire that shows itself as a demand. Freud recognized this aspect of negation as “the essential form of the ego’s unconscious function, of the alienation of the subject,” (Lemaire, 1996,74).

To figure out how this can resolve the symptom and neurosis in analysis, Lacan introduces what he calls ‘the intermediary zone’ on the above graph of desire. This zone is the locus created by four vertices between the upper and lower lines or signifying chains. The four vertices (in geometry, a vert is a point where curves or edges meet) that demarcate the corners of ‘the

intermediary zone’ are, $S(A)$, $\$ \leftrightarrow D$, $s(A)$, and A . The specular relationship between the ego and its mirror image (specular image or simply the ego’s double) that Lacan calls the ego’s narcissistic relationship $m \rightarrow i(a)$ in the near side of ‘the intermediary zone) connected in a prior relation to the demand. The small d or desire, if it is the Other’s desire, is in ‘the intermediary zone,’ which lies at the heart of the subject’s speech. Desire, which the subject addresses to the Other, lies beyond the need and its satisfaction.

It’s present [desire] in the form of an absolute condition and is produced in the margin between the demand for the satisfaction of needs and the demand for love. Man’s desire is always, for him, to be sought in the locus of the Other as the locus of speech, which means that desire is a desire structured in this locus of the Other.

That is the entire problem of desire. It’s what makes it subject to the dialectic and the formation of the unconscious. That is why we are involved with it and are able to have an influence on it, according to whether it is or is not articulated in speech in analysis.

There would be no analysis if it weren’t for this fundamental situation. (Lacan, 2017, 481)

At the imaginary level, we notice the ego supported by its double or specular image at the symbolic level. On the other hand, its object $[\$ \leftrightarrow a]$ supports desire that is determined by the subject’s position with the Other. Such a relationship with fantasies helps the subject situate his desire within the fantasy, rooted in its original structure.

It’s always a question of the drive, *Trieb*, the technical term we give to this desire insofar as speech isolates it, fragments it and places it in this problematic and disjointed relationship to its aim that one calls the direction of the tendency, and whose object is, moreover, subject to substitution and displacement or, indeed, to all forms of

transformation and equivalents, but is also offered to love, which makes it a subject of speech. (418-419)

The use of mathematics, geometry, and topology in Lacan's text often presents a puzzle that intimidates many readers. He uses such transdisciplinary elements in his own way for illustration, pedagogy, and "to be able to pass from *saying* to *showing*; in other words, to induce every member of the audience—as well as himself—to carry out operations relating no longer to discourse but to "demonstration," (Roudinesco, 1994, 363). Lacan never uses mathematics as it was used by Western philosophers before him, such as Descartes, Kant, or Russell. However, as his biographer, Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan* writes that Lacan painstakingly worked with his mathematician friends. His close ties with the anthropologist Levi Strauss helped him discover the relevance of the *Möbius strip*, *Borromean knot*, *Torus*, *Cross-cap*, *Klein bottle*, etc., to his theory. Lacan showed interest in using the way of expression of the truth by mathematics, for the ambiguities that the signifiers produce in language make this function impossible.

Lacan then returns to Maurice Bouvet's essay, "Importance of the Homosexual Aspect of Transference," where the author emphasizes the analyst's triggering of transference and sustenance. This way, the analyst extracts further information from his patient. Within the formula $[\$ \leftrightarrow a]$, the obsessional subject balances its obsessional economy concerning the object *a*.

The obsessional identifies with the object *a*, as the imaginary other. While Lacan agrees with Freud's insistence on upholding the transference in the course of analysis, he also suggests that the silence or non-action of the analyst helps the analysand's discourse backslide to the imaginary experience of early childhood. As such, the analyst may well be able to get to the analysand's hidden truth of desire. In this imaginary regression where the analysand supposed the analyst to know identifies with the analyst. That means *méconnaissance* that in the imaginary self-knowledge of the subject is another word for misunderstanding. The identification of the analysand with the analyst takes place in this imaginary regression. In his theory of the mirror stage, Lacan points out the formation of the ego as a process that is subject to alienation. The transference thus establishes the role of the analyst in the analytic dialogue. The imaginary regression provides a space where the analysand's unconscious repeat the situation of childhood experience. That regression itself comes about through an imaginary collaboration between the analyst and the analysand systematically.

Together with the treatment process, the analysis turns into a relationship between two persons, namely the analyst and the analysand. Lacan also reminds us that in such an imaginary relationship, the destructive drive towards one's semblable ultimately redirects itself to the subject. Observation of such a frustrating destructive drive is familiar with the analysand when he encounters the silence and non-action of the analyst in response to his demand in the dialogue. By choosing another object, the subject manages to make a pact with the desire of the Other. This means that the subject-Other relation reincarnates itself in terms of a bond between the analyst and his patient.

Ratifying the subject's fantasmatic production at the level of the signified of the Other, $s(A)$, reduces the complex formations of desire in the subject to the demand articulated in the subject's immediate relationship to the analyst, (422).

In such a situation, the analysand realizes the body of the analyst as a phallus. The Catholic Communion for Lacan was a representative cultural testimony for the shifting away from the

object—Jesus or his blood—to bread and wine. Lacan emphasizes that a ‘cure effect and relieving the symptom in such a personal situation can be possible during analysis.

The subjective reduction of symptoms is achieved via a regressive process, not in the purely temporal sense, but in the topical sense as well, insofar as there is a reduction of everything in the order of desire—its production, organization and maintenance—onto the plane of demand. The stages of the treatment, very far from being interpretable in the sense of an amelioration and normalization of relations with the other, are marked by sudden outbursts which take various forms, including acting out. (423)

As the quote spells out, relieving symptoms from the onerous burden of desire during the therapeutic moments in the analysis. The subject gets preoccupied with a subjective production in a ‘sudden outburst’ especially acting out. As repeatedly mentioned, acting out and passing to act are two different concepts in the subject’s behavior, revealing the unconscious intention. Acting out takes place in the active presence in the scene of the subject who ignores the Other. The act out manifests the subject when demonstrating desire in a distorted way. I would remind readers of Nora’s wild tarantella in the second act of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* as an example of acting out. To avoid the revelation of her secret, she goes into a violent whirling dance. All bungled actions and parapraxes represent the act out. However, passing to act is the final act when the subject enters the field of the Other, and the subject is not present in the scene. Freud postulates the passage to act as a perversive act, when the subject steps beyond the threshold of the self, as Lacan reminds us in *Seminar IV*, that “during this passage a l’acte, something is brought about that is both a fusion and a point of access to what lies beyond, which is strictly speaking the trans-individual dimension that Freud’s anaclitic theory formulated.” (Lacan, 2020, 77)

Another essay by the same author, “Therapeutic Effects of Becoming Aware of Penis Envy in Obsessional Neurosis in Women,” that Lacan scrutinizes explore additional information to the problem of obsessional neurosis in women. To free herself from infantile anxieties as a male obsessional, the female obsessional also regressively identifies with the phallic object. During the analysis, the second feminine identification takes place with the analyst himself. The identification with the analyst occurs in two consecutive modes. The first is fundamentally controversial and with hostility towards masculinity. Then these conflicts alleviate with a new problem. The advance in treatment based on identification with the analyst is also possible among the female obsessional. The essay proposes that the female analysand exhibits fear and aggressivity to have the male phallus. Kleinian insight also suggests that the power of becoming conscious of the desire to acquire the phallus enables a female obsessional to dominate and even, as Lacan says, castrate the male analyst. Lacan then examines the treatment of a female patient with her obsession with religious issues by Bouvet in his essay.

She is a woman, fifty years of age, in good health, mother of two children, practising in a paramedic profession. She comes for a series of obsessional phenomena that are of a common kind—an obsession with having contracted syphilis, and she sees in it some kind of prohibition bearing upon the marriage of her children, which moreover she was unable to prevent concerning her oldest, an obsession with infanticide, an obsession with poisoning—in short, a whole series of common obsessions in obsessional manifestations in a woman. (Lacan, 2017, 425-426)

Lacan concludes that an obsessional pretends to have the phallus by fetishizing a phallic object in her dreams and behavior. Alternatively, she gets herself in a position by wearing proper clothing to be the object of desire for the male subject. In analysis, such feminine actions take place in a woman’s behavior by passing through transformation. In analysis, this process might invoke

anger on the female subject to reject the analyst's insistence that she desires to possess the phallus that has a desire to be a man. In such a critical point in the analysis, the female analysand, as Lacan quote from the above essay, would tell the analyst:

'When I am well dressed'—that is, when I'm wearing pretty shoes—'men desire me, and I tell myself, with very real joy, "And now they too will get their comeuppance. I am happy imagining that they will suffer as a result. (427)

Lacan discovers the picture of such a process in a Christian context, through which the name Jesus appears as a logos or word. This name functions as the signifier of his flesh and blood. This word is then the phallus for the desiring subject, whether a male and a female obsessional. Since the female subject's phallus signifies her desire, she tries to keep its symbolic presence. The analyst understands the aggressiveness that is directed towards him in the analysis. As part of the treatment, the analyst describes that the analysand's destructive intention in fantasies comes back to no one but herself. The analyst progresses treatment by allowing his analysand to carry on with a desire for having or rather possessing the phallus. As a result of this therapeutic method, the analyst encourages the analysand to continue her obsessions not to cause anxiety. In the end, the female analysand asks her son to go to the same analyst for treatment. Lacan observes this as the return of the analyst phallus back to him. Lacan calls this interpersonal relationship between the analyst and analyst 'give and take.' That is what the analyst tried to bring as a conclusion in the analysis to his female analysand. As such, the analyst offers some pacification to his patient.

To recap the session, Lacan concentrates on two topics. The first part, by mathematical formalization, uncovers how demand relates to desire. The inherent opacity of the demand on its part multiplies the obscurities in desire. The root and branch cause for such opacity is the instability and ambiguity of the signifiers that convey and organize demand and desire. The demand couples the instinctive need with what Lacan calls love and presence, which signifiers unfold. He found mathematics the best way of delivering and formalizing his theories. He preferred mathematical symbolization to language. As such, Lacan quarrels with the limits of philosophical conceptualization of the truth and real or what Badiou calls "the truth-knowledge-real triad."

The real is impossible to know (*connaître*) precisely because it is embedded in the truth-knowledge-real triad and can't be extracted from it in order to be paired with one of the other two terms. You even always have to say about the real that it "supplants knowing" (*dépose le connaître*). Lacan calls this supplanting of knowing the "demonstration" of the real, which is a pretty strange word, albeit a very compelling one. The real cannot be known; it must be demonstrated. (Badiou, 2010, 58)

For such a demonstration, Lacan de-ontologizes language and draws on mathematical symbolization. The formulas of the split subject in relation to demand and desire [$\$ \langle \rangle D$], [$\$ \langle \rangle a$] for example, symbolizes what Lacan formalizes for demand and desire. The inherited ambiguities in conceptualization by language. Each element of the formula, as was argued above, stands not for a fixed meaning but signifying chain that is composed of multiple signifiers. That explains the passion of Lacan for mathematics. The real, like the real in mathematics, does not lend itself to formalization and representation, "we know it exists, but we don't know the content of this existence." (Leupin, 2004, 17)

The second part of the session concentrates on the status of the female obsessional along with analytic practice. A female obsessional, like her male counterpart, identifies with the phallic

object. In analysis, a female obsessional seeks the phallus from the very presence of the analyst. Her fear and aggressivity in dreams and fantasies show her efforts to have the phallus. Lacan confirms such an attitude in the course of analysis as well. All this intends to bring a symbolic presence of the phallus—the signifier of the desire—in the scene.

Notes:

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