

April 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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### Image, Symbol, and Signifier (VI)

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Psychoanalysis approaches a symbol, and by consequence, the formation of a symbol and symbolization as crucial points for the subject's constitution and the culture where the unconscious thoughts, motives, and instinctual processes play a determining role. In other words, the unconscious establishes the evolutionary substitution of the symbol or image and their referents. The core of their importance is the metaphoric nature of each symbol as something that represents something else. Replacement of one idea for another also comes under the same category. From a word to a social institution, and from an individual human gesture to a common cultural phenomenon, all functions symbolically. Jones takes symbolization as the universal foundation of human civilization. He divided symbolism into two groups, common symbolization, and 'true' symbolization. The second category was of greater psychoanalytic importance for Jones for 'true' symbolism refers to the unconscious validation of a repressed idea and propensities through symbols and images. Moreover, this category of symbolization "resembles dreaming and symptom-formation in that they are private constructions, the meaning of which is discoverable only in terms of the individual experience of the subject [issue or problem] and not by reference to dictionaries or social conventions," (Rycroft, 1972, 162-163). Jung added a spiritual dimension to symbolism in mythology, religious literature, cultural events, and so on.

At the outset of the session, Lacan makes references to the meaning of the processes of symbolization in Charles Rycroft and Jones. He also considers Melanie Klein's notion of the implication of the symbols in constructing the ego. Rycroft argues that the 'primary' and 'secondary' process of the psyche classifies (the Id and Ego). In poetic imagination and aesthetic creativity, both processes play a constitutive role. The primary processes are characterized by Freudian concepts of 'condensation' and 'displacement' where the pleasure principle has the dominant position. The secondary processes go through the father's law in the symbolic order, which are governed by the reality principle. The overpowering tension of pleasure principle chances the reduction of the unpleasure into hallucinatory satisfaction that emerges in dreams and in various symptoms. Lacan argues that the internal impulses inflame, "instinctual cycle the movement, however uncoordinated, of appetite, then the searching and the locating in reality, it is satisfied via the pathway of the memory traces of what previously satisfied the desire," (Lacan, 2017, 198-199). The satisfaction is then reproduced in hallucination because the prior *jouissance* is impermissible by the reality principle's logical construction.

In response to impulses from the drives, there is, supposedly, always a tendency in the human subject—it obviously cannot be anything else, but the point isn't very clearly defined—towards the hallucinatory satisfaction of desire. This would be a virtual

possibility—constitutive, as it were—of the subject’s position with respect to the world.  
(198)

Lacan spells out how a hallucinatory satisfaction of desire works in terms of a neurological process called *reflex arc*—a neural pathway of controlling a reflex. When a need arises from an internal impulse, it activates an instinctual circle that moves “via the pathway of the memory traces of what previously satisfied the desire. This, quite simply, is how satisfaction tends to be reproduced on the hallucinatory plane” (199). Of course, that calls this account into question why humans and the cycle of their psychical processes cannot satisfy through this easy way? Such an imagined satisfaction works in the sexual matter but not when a need arises when hunger strikes us. In other words, the relation between the drive of a need and its satisfaction exists in sexual satisfaction as a sexual object could have an illusory status. In this case, psychoanalysis looks at the dialectic of (need and satisfaction), and the whole circumstantial primitive gratification and frustration when the newborn child is in close relationship with the mother. Lacan reminds us that the Kleinian school of psychoanalysis justifies a kind of imaginary perception (fantasy) when a need arises in the subject. In the world of a child, his real experiences lead the subject to find out what lies underneath when something real occurs in the background of complete unreality. Lacan calls a subject's sustained harmony with his experience as a kind of psychotic structure, as he states, “From this perspective, a normal subject, is, in short, a psychosis that has turned out well, a psychosis in harmony with experience,” (200). The mother gives her child objects (breast, lips, etc.) With the hallucinatory satisfaction of a need, a gap opens in the child that causes him to make up a line of wishful thinking (daydreaming and fantasy). It becomes impossible for him, at the early stage, to differentiate between the hallucinatory satisfaction of his desire and the reality. This whole process takes place in the early life of a child that Lacan observes as the hallucinatory satisfaction of the fundamental need in the primary process identified as filled with the pleasure principle. Lacan takes his lead from Freud that the typical example of hallucinatory satisfaction occurs in dreams of children. This argument encouraged psychiatry to examine the troubled linkage of the patients to reality in their delusion. Psychiatry referred to this symptomatic performance in the dreams of the children.

Here Lacan considers the Kleinian theory of fantasy at the level of the primitive pre-Oedipal process. Klein claims that the fantasy is a primary element in the unconscious process that takes hold in an infant's psyche. The fantasy is involved in the body and its drives. The fantasy is also implicated in the renovation of symptoms and hallucinations. As it has just specified Lacan’s consideration of the *reflexive arc*, hallucinatory satisfaction is reinforcing Kleinian arguments about the pre-Oedipal fantasies. The noteworthy points in the views of Klein are.

First, she says that fantasy can be considered the primary content of the unconscious process. Second, she says that fantasy, as such, primarily concerns the body. Third, she states the fantasy is the psychical representation of the drives. Fourth, she emphasizes that the existence of fantasies is independent of one’s life in the “outside world,” and also independent of minds. Fifth, she says that fantasies are both psychical and bodily effects, including, for example, conversion symptoms, hallucinations, neurotic symptoms, and so on. (in other words, she conflates symptoms and fantasies.) Sixth, fantasies are the link between the drives and cancers; what she understands by the term “cancers” is protective identification and interjection. Seventh, adaptation to reality is rooted in unconscious terms. (Koehler, 1996, 113)

It is not to say that Lacan allies himself with Klein when it comes to fantasy. Lacan criticizes her argument for the lack of her consideration of the signifier. For Lacan, fantasy is a construction

with a high level of signification that compensates for the fading of the primordial object of desire in the subject. Fantasy is also a construction that takes place when the signifying chain is interrupted. Furthermore, in Lacan, a symptom and fantasy belong to different categories.

Lacan draws attention to the subjective position of the subject in his relationship with the outside world. To clarify this idea, he refocuses on the topological illustration in the elementary graph of desire. In point *A* of the graph, [please look at March Seminar for the graph] the need filters through the Other, which modifies the pure need. From this point on, the need becomes a desire, which identifies the relation of the subject with the signifier. (please look at the graph in the March Seminar).

Here, we have the desiring intention crossing what is laid down for the subject as the signifying chain –either the requirements of the signifying chain have already imposed on his [the subject] subjectivity, or, from the start, he only ever encounters it in the following form, which is that it's always and already constituted in the mother. (Lacan, 2017, 203)

Lacan is going to reiterate his argument that the subject faces the signifying chain as the Other, which comes to his message in an inverted form. But the need insists for a hallucinatory fulfillment when the subject encounters the absence of the object of desire. In this encounter, the signifiers of the 'presence' and the 'absence' come into play. Like Freud shows the symbolization of the mother's 'absence' and presence in his *fort/da* (the phonemes meaning gone/there) game. These signifiers are organized in a symbolic relationship. The hallucinatory satisfaction of desire occurs in the graph at point *A*, which is the Other and the locus of the signifiers.

Instead of relying on Klein's theory of the mother-child bond, Lacan puts forward his mirror stage in which the ego is formed on the ground of an image, not a virtual reality from outside of the subject. When the ego identifies itself as the image of the other, the child develops narcissistic aggressivity. In recourse to the mirror stage, the subject's fragmented body remains incompatible with the imagined perfect image in the mirror. The mirror image of the subject is not his own but a replica of the imagined and ideal image. Following Jung, this ideal image is an *imago* and Gestalt with a transformative quality. Lacan called this the *urbild* of the subject, which means a prototype of his ego. In religious literature, Jung would say that God created man in his own image finds its crystallization as the universal unconscious archetype. This image in the mirror stage has a compelling force that occupies part of the subject's libido and instinct. According to Lacan, the internalization of this image enables the subject to shape his "behavior in the world" (208). Lacan goes further that the mirror image has an illusory and deceptive status. Still it creates an illusion of the Other's desire for the subject. In the meantime, every human trace takes its form from this ideal image. The subject coordinates his ego based on an elusive foundation of reality, which the subject makes his primary ego identification.

That's the whole point of the child's jubilatory activity in front of the mirror. His image of the body is acquired as something that both exists and doesn't exist at the same time, and he positions his own movements as well as the image of those who are there with him in front of the mirror concerning it. What is special about this experience is that it presents the subject with a reality that is virtual, unrealized, grasped as such, and is to be acquired. (Ibid)

Such a process evolves concerning multiple signifying identifications of the subject in the imaginary register until the father's incursion (the Name-of-the-father) that disrupts this process and introduces the symbolic order. The primordial maternal object's loss in symptomatic guise reappears as the fetishized objects (stamp, coins, body parts, brand-name, etc.)

Lacan himself recap the main points of this session as follows:

The question of the object is crucial for the analysts for they experience them in their day-to-day practice. The source from which the objects come is an even more critical aspect of this question. These illusory formations of the object take shape in the imaginary register, of which the mirror stage is a highpoint. The idea of this illusory object came about at the dawn of civilization when philosophers began to think. Schopenhauer knew this before Freud brought the notion into his theoretical inquiry. Lacan compares the illusory object to Maya's veils—in ancient Hinduism, a belief that man sees the world by looking at many veils, which distort the truths from him. Lacan concludes that the object of sexual need historically has had an imaginary attractiveness. That is the reason why the very sight of a woman functions as a trap for a man for it inflame in him, the “energy that is said to be intended for the reproduction of the species. The whole problem is there,” (Lacan, 2017, 212). The illusory object does not play its role as an image alone but “as a signifying element, taken up into a signifying chain” (213). A charm of a fetish, especially in perversion, illustrates this illusory object and image. In sadism and masochism, this illusory object comes into play, in the former in the guise of beating someone (the object) and in the latter as the willingness for being beaten. Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* predicts that fetuses would be available in bottles in his futuristic utopia. However, there would still be a subject who expresses her need to be hit. As such, Huxley sense something in the human world that cannot be denied. In an essay, “The Child is Being Beaten,” Freud examines the fantasy of whipping not merely as an expression of a pure drive, but a product of an infantile subjective scenario. The scenario manifests itself in countless modifications. The illusory object forms the body parts that have an imaginary origin and function as a signifier in a subject's life. A subject's relation to the signification is related to the object, ‘a metonymic object.’ The subject identifies with this object in the imaginary because of the existence of signifiers. The object tends to remain in the imaginary in all subjective development, which “has a name. It's called the phallus.” (215)

## Notes

Koehler Françoise, 1996, “Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan,” *Reading Seminar I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, ed. Bruce Fink, et al., State University of New York Press. N Y.

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

Rycroft, Charles, 1972, *A Critical Dictionary of psychoanalysis*, Penguin Books, London.