

May 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:
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Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious (VII)

Fantasy and Beyond the Pleasure Principle

Ein Kind Wird Geschlagen (Child is Being Beaten)

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OEDIPUS: *A holy mystery that no tongue may name.*
Oedipus at Colonus

Lacan begins by probing a series of ideas from his contemporary psychoanalysts, Ernest Jones, Otto Rank, Hanns Sachs, including Freud, when he theorizes that signifiers play a significant role in forming the symptoms, perversion, and neurosis, for example. Similarly, in perversion and neurosis, the same structure of conciliation, sidestepping, and the dialectic of the repressed and return of the repressed comes into play. In perversion, the subject does not recognize what includes in the repressed. If he does otherwise, he must recognize other things, including the intolerable repressed articulation or what Lacan calls articulated signifying chain, which in the meantime, defines the conceptualization of repression. That is what happens in neurosis as well. The subject continues to deny the recognition of something that seems necessary. Both neurosis and perversion are identified with such an omission (lack of recognition) of a fundamental Oedipal element. Still, there is one difference between the two, and that is that in neurosis, the drive is avoided, whereas, in perversion, the drives as signifiers of instincts are active in their full swing. That implies that fantasy plays a significant role in perversion, which offers the subject an imaginary satisfaction. In fantasy, the relationship of the subject to reality is imaginary and coordinated with signifiers. The fetishistic objects should not be accounted for the instinctual economy, as Lacan argues.

They are instrumental elements isolated in a form that is too symbolic for it to be possible to misunderstand this for a moment, once one has explored the lived reality of perversion. (Lacan, 2017, 218)

Lacan then reexamines Freud's infantile fantasy of 'a child is being beaten.'

Before expounding on his analysis, let us briefly review Freud's essay of 1919 of the same title where he develops his theory of the infantile fantasy of beating that he recollected mainly from his patients, most of whom were girls. Freud himself articulated in linguistic terms the whole infantile fantasy of beating into three statements. While the primal scene (compulsive repetition of the scene, subject, and object) in the fantasy is his main ground for theorization, he divides the case history into three statements with enormous signifying inspiration.

1. *My father is beating the child.*
2. *My father is beating the child whom I hate.*
3. *I am being beaten by my father.*

The first and the third phases are conscious statements where the father is the one who is beating, but the child is unknown in the first statement. Freud considers the second phase as the one that remains unconscious associated with repression. The first and second phases, according to Freud, are sadistic. The third phase depicts masochism as the object (the child) of the first and the second statements turn into the ego. However, the one who produces this fantasy is one child. The transformation of sadism into masochism is a result of the guilt that the fanaticizing child carries around. Freud argues that the beating fantasy bears evidence that "there seems to be a confirmation of the view that masochism is not the manifestation of a primary instinct, but that which originates from sadism which has been turned round upon the self—that is to say, through regression from an object to the ego. Instinct with a passive aim must be taken for granted as existing, especially among women," (Freud, 1993, 180). Freud highlights two crucial aspects, namely erotic and satisfaction concerning infantile jealousy and the child's egoistic comforts. Still, Freud claims that it is not crystal clear that we identify the beating fantasy 'sexual' or 'sadistic.' The division between 'sexual' and 'sadistic' get blurry when we take the fantasy to its source. Here Freud recalls the inherited ambiguity in the prophecy of three witches in the first act of *Macbeth*. The prediction portrays Macbeth as happy and not happy, for he will never be a king, but he will reach his primary goal. In the same way, "Not clearly sexual, not in itself sadistic, but yet the stuff from which both will later come," (173).

First With: "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater
Second With: Not so happy, yet much happier
Third Witch: Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none."
(Act I, Scene, 3: 67-69)

Freud concludes his thesis that the stirring force that forms the symptom and its principle substance (perversion and neurosis) is related to the Oedipus complex, as the "nuclear complex of neurosis," (Freud, 1993, 193). Freudian scholars believe that the fantasy of beating is gathered from observing his talented Anna's (his daughter) infantile recounts. Anna and Ernst, the champion of the *fort/da* game, both became psychoanalysts. Anna Freud also wrote her seminal essay, "Beating Fantasies and Daydreams."

The case, in fact, was her own [Anna Freuds'], and given that her analysis with Freud was taking place in 1919, it is clear that the material Freud dealt with in his study of the beating phantasy was rather close to home. (Leader, 2000, 154)

To return to view what is Lacan's take on the Freudian beating fantasy. The first thing that strikes us is the Lacan's adjustment of the Oedipus complex that, for Freud, was the crucial constituting factor in the development of an individual and the whole civilization. However, looking at the Oedipus complex stages here, Lacan is still in league with Freud. Lacan examines

the above three statements as a script with multiple theatricalities for the subject is playing a role which is determined by his imaginary relationship to reality, and the apparatus of the signifier conforms to this imaginary relationship. Important in this process is the visual qualities of the fantasy and the subject's ability to claim libidinal satisfaction. The subject in the statement indicates that she is interested more to be the spectator, even as the third statement suggests she is being beaten. The person who does the beating is someone in a position of authority such as a schoolteacher, an all-powerful man, the King, or a tyrant that Lacan sums up in the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father. Lacan demonstrates his interest in transformations, antecedents, and its underlying history that the analysis empowered Freud to see. Lacan calls these potentials "the avatars of the fantasy," (Lacan, 2017, 220). The first statement that characterizes the first phase (translated in the seminar as stage) of the fantasy implies that the beaten one is a sibling, sister, or brother of the subject. By quoting from Macbeth, Freud suggests that this phase of the fantasy is between sexual or sadistic. Lacan reads this as a literary representation of the coexistence between the life and death instincts. The father satisfies the fantasizing subject's jealousy by not loving and humiliating the child. Lacan states that here, "the subject is targeted in his existence as a subject," (Ibid). For him, the fantasy in this phase was tied up with the pre-Oedipal stage.

'My father does not love him' is the meaning of the primitive fantasy and it's what gives the subject pleasure—the other isn't loved, that is, isn't established in a properly symbolic relationship. This is the perspective from which the father's intervention acquires its primary value for the subject, on which everything that follows depends...We are prior to the Oedipus complex, and yet the father is there. (121)

As the statement unfolds, the second phase exposes the subject with a privileged relation with the father, for it signifies that the father is beating her rival sibling. The second phase of the fantasy is in the Oedipus complex, for the subject in her Oedipal desire finds herself the father's favorite. The third phase begins as the third statement signifies the subject arising from the Oedipus complex. Due to the repression, the subject reveals the ultimate authority of the father as a high-handed figure. That is why in the post-Oedipal stage, the master signifier, the Name-of-the-Father, signifies the signifying chain. This signifier remains veiled because it is in its nature as a signifier.

The phallus enters into play immediately the subject addresses the mother's desire. This phallus is veiled and will remain veiled to the end of time for one simple reason, which is that it's an ultimate signifier in the signifier's relationship with signified. (223)

For Lacan, the importance of the play of signifiers in fantasy creates a sense and meaning effects. For example, in the masochistic fantasy in the infantile life, we do not have an evolution of the instinct but a crucial signifier that Lacan calls the 'whip'. This signifier has a central position in the stream of the signifier that Lacan calls 'hieroglyphs'. This centrality signifies the importance of the 'hieroglyph' holding the whip and acts as "director, the governor, and the master," (225). The visual signification in the first phase of fantasy suggests that the subject has no rival, and he is expelled from the signifying chain. In the second phase, there is a rival as the statement approves it, *'My father is beating the child whom I hate.'* and in the third phase, as its statement implies, the subject fantasizes the beating on himself because it identifies an exit from the Oedipal triangle by imposing castration. The Oedipus complex for Freud was a "proper name of this infantile death-wish," (Gallop, 1985, 168). A year after Freud presented his theory of masochism, he recourse to the importance of masochism in his postulation, *beyond the pleasure principle*. The last statement, *I am Being Beaten by my Father*, reveals that the subject reiterates his own beating as an experienced event, which for Freud and Lacan, a manifestation of the death

instinct. The signifier's materiality, represented as Lacan, argues, by the 'whip,' and its law. This phase of the fantasy, as such, demonstrates the relationship between the subject and the signifier. The enclosure of masochism in the beyond the pleasure principle points toward the subject's "mode of resistance or inertia" (Lacan, 2017, 226) in this enclosure. This means for Lacan that the pleasure principle itself is an indication of a predisposition of life to return to an inanimate status. That, according to Lacan, is a return to "the zero tension...the last resort of libidinal evolution is to return to the stillness of a stone." (Ibid). At this point, the pleasure principle is located beyond the pleasure principle. This state, a 'mummification' of the subject, as Lacan calls it in *The Television*, was named by Freud following a suggestion by Barbara Low, 'the Nirvana principle.' For Freud, Nirvana was a principle of the evolution of all living species that instinctively wish to reach a state of consistency in eternal death. That means that the pleasure does not end in this desire but increases to its climax. Freud insists that the adverse reaction [negative reaction] during analysis signifies such an inbuilt instinct. Lacan invokes the last word of Oedipus, *me phenai* "of Oedipus at Colonus [verse 1224], in the 'would that I were not,' which means 'not to have been borne,'" (Lacan, 2015, 301). Lacan hints at *me phenai* that implies not having been borne was an unconscious expression that Oedipus makes. The real meaning of this expression is that having been borne was his destiny.

This remark that Oedipus ends up making, his *μή φώναι* (*me phunai*), as the final word that gives the meaning in which the adventure of tragedy culminates, does not abolish the latter, far from it. On the contrary, it eternalizes it, for the simple reason that, if Oedipus was unable to succeed in stating it, he would not be the supreme hero that he is. (Lacan, 2017, 227)

In Seminar VIII: Transference, Lacan further clarify this when he gives an example in French.

In an expression like *je crains qu'il ne vienne* ["I am afraid he may (not) come" or "I cannot but fear he is coming"] or *avant qu'il n'apparaisse* ["before he not but appear"]. It appears to be an expletive in such contexts, according to grammarians, whereas it is precisely there that the tip of desire's iceberg appears—not the subject of the statement who is "I," he who is currently speaking, but the subject in which enunciation finds its origin. (Lacan, 2015, 301)

Lacan states that Freud postulated that at the end of the beyond the pleasure principle lies the subject's inclination for a permanent respite in death. As such, a harmony between the *eros* and *thanatos* (life and death instincts) will sustain. For Freud, this was the truth of each living being. Thanatos reveals itself in a subject aggressive response to his surroundings and partly remains as the pain of being'. Lacan also confirms that this adverse reaction to therapy in his clinical experience happens to his patient, an irresistible 'suicide', self-annihilation, and a tendency to walk away from treatment.

In sum, Lacan spells out Freud's remarkable beating fantasy and its division into neurotic and pervers. He reintegrates Freud's orthodox consideration into his theorization with his linguistic system. Lacan shows fantasy as support of desire and, in fact, a stage that desire comes into play when the subject is submitted to the signifier and its law. The dynamic behind this show of desire lies in the Oedipus complex, during which the subject oscillates between her parents. The subject tends to be hidden in fantasy (in dreams and daydreaming). However, his presence as a protagonist and the determiner persists in the drama. In fantasy, "the subject sustains himself as desiring in relation to an even more complex signifying ensemble," (Lacan, 1994, 185). The fantasy shows the subject divided and split, left alone with the object petit a. That is the

definition of Lacan's famous formula of fantasy, $\$ \langle \rangle a$. In perversion, this formula reverses into $a \langle \rangle \$$. Lacan reaffirms his fantasy position in the unpublished *Seminar XIV: The Logic of Fantasy* that always distinguishes the subject and object a in a signifying arrangement where the earlier is put on 'the pedestal'. The second part of the session highlights the origin of masochism in the fantasy that is linked with beyond the pleasure principle. He agrees with Freud that beyond the pleasure principle is the domain of the death drive. That crosses the border between the pleasure principle and beyond pleasure. When the pleasure crosses the border, it doesn't mean that the pleasure tends to subside. On the contrary, the pleasure in beyond the pleasure principles evolves as the climax of the pleasure.

Note

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