

September 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

Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious (XI)

Desire and its Formulas

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Reminding his listeners, Lacan picks the thread of his last discussion by saying that the identification in the final phase of the Oedipus complex gives rise to the ego-ideal. Analytical experience always revolves around explicating the ego-ideal at this chaotic stage of the Oedipus complex despite its growing 'centrifugal' state. Here Lacan wants to lay stress that each identification that the ego-ideal gets unfolds simultaneously the relationship of the subject with the signifiers in the other's field that were called insignias. This relationship inscribes itself on a desire, which is different from what brings the subject and the Other together. The subject and the Other, in the meantime, functions here as the carriers of the above insignias.

At the outset, Lacan promises to introduce and clarify the meaning of the three formulas that he calls the formulas of desire. However, it is essential to note that he does not explain the formulas and their signs conventionally as a math teacher would do. He commences by discussing the S (subject), the big A (Other), and *a* (object *a*) and their internal relationship. The identification takes shape when the subject realizes that the signifiers necessitate the relation of the desire between the subject and a third party.

He suggests that in analysis, there is something that one cannot steadily look at like we cannot look progressively to 'the sun or death' (Lacan quotes the French author François de la Rochefoucauld). The castration complex is such a crucial thing, 'a strange thing' in the subject's formation that we did not have a record before Freud. The castration complex holds a horrible threat in the formation of the subject, which is, at once, symptomatic and normative. The threat is associated with the subject and his Oedipal ties with the mother and the father. Father here is the threatening agent, whereas the mother is a concealed object of desire. In other words, the mother is a key but a hidden object. This relationship between the subject and this hidden object is open for analysts to see in their clinical experience with neurotic patients.

We find a thousand forms, a thousand reflections, a dispersion of images and fundamental relationships, all of whose repercussions, effects and multiple psychological facets we have to grasp in the experience of the neurotic subject...What happens in this phenomenon that I will call the phenomenon of psychologizing motivation. (Lacan, 2017, 288)

The primary issue here is the existence of the father in engendering this narcissistic fear. A proclivity in the subject will arise to respond to this fear by looking after his body's integrity to save it from harm. As the term complex denotes, this fear multiplies as Melanie Klein envisages other fears, such as fear of parental genitalia. The castration complex is then isolated as "a partial, primordial, aggressive, and henceforth disconnected, drive," (289). The analytic practice finds this complex as a critical aspect of the subjective economy in neurosis. Klein perceives the onset of this multiple fear at the beginning of the Oedipus complex—a phase before the rise of characters involved in the complex.

Before the invocation of a sustained fear, castration is connected to a desire in the subject. It gains conceptual support when it is considered in its signifying features. The predominant aspect of this signifying feature is that it is a mark of desire—the phallus. Its ceremonious and ritualistic existence of the phallus in festivals is a marker that anthropology has already recognized at a broader social and cultural level. In religion, circumcision and other spiritual rites bear evidence of this as a marker and imprint in the human psyche. The gap in every desire accommodates this marker with its signification and function. To investigate the spatial position for this signifier in myths, Freud wrote *Totem and Taboo*.

His satisfaction wasn't in rediscovering the little human animal that he found himself occupied with in his consulting rooms, magnified to the dimension of the heavens. It was not the celestial dog in relation to the terrestrial dog, as in Spinoza. (291)

Here, Lacan refers to Spinoza's metaphor for the substance and mental concept by using a dog in the constellation that is different from the dog that barks. This analogy also unfolds the status of the phallus and the Oedipus complex as a transcendental matter. That happens in Freud when he observes the significance of the phallus beyond the evidence in his clinic. However, Freud in *Totem and Taboo* draws on clinical evidence conceptualized that the road from nature to humans must be traversed through the 'murder of the father' as myths expose.

Lacan appreciates Freud's way of scientific research that he always made for his theories. The documents that he amassed from his observations showed him the signs that he tracked when "the function of a phobia meets the theme of the totem," (Ibid). Behind the phobia as a symptom, there is a foregrounding signifier which remains isolated. Lacan reminds his audience of his *Seminar IV: On Object Relation* [to be published in English in March 2021 by Polity Press], where he taught them "how the signifier of a phobia can have thirty-six thousand signification for the subject," (292). The essential is the absent signifier that makes signification possible. Without this signifier, the subject loses his ways through the swarm of all these signifiers. The totem is such a signifier by which a subject finds his place in the signifier. The spiritual signification of a totem (iconic object or image), according to Freud, symbolizes the primal father of the horde whose sons murder him in order to dethrone his absolute father of the horde with all privileges. The totem hides what lies at the murder of the primal father and prohibits incest. Lacan argues that the totem hides the linkage between the primal father's death and the signifier's advent. So what is Freud did in his book was astonishing for Lacan, for he linked signifier and desire.

On the contrary, Stoic, Plato, Christianity, and all until Freud's time tried to separate the signifier from desire. They also reduce the notion of the desire for an economy of pleasure. Thus they avoid the essence of desire altogether. Lacan then introduces the three formulas of desire and tries to provide their meaning. The formulas also point to the analytic and theoretical issues concerning the concept of desire.

$$\begin{aligned}
 d &\rightarrow \$ \langle \rangle a \rightleftarrows i(a) \leftarrow m \\
 D &\rightarrow A \langle \rangle d \rightleftarrows s(A) \leftarrow I \\
 \Delta &\rightarrow \$ \langle \rangle D \rightleftarrows S(\bar{A}) \leftarrow \Phi
 \end{aligned}$$

In the above formulas, the letter *d* stands for desire and $\$$ for the barred subject. The letter symbolizes the little other, the image of which is semblable and captivate the subject's body image around which he/she articulates their primary narcissistic identification identified as the ego.

The first line places these letters in a certain relationship to one another where the arrows indicate that it cannot go from one side to the other, no matter which side it starts from, but that it stops at the point where one directional arrow meets another with the opposite sign. The egoic or narcissistic identification finds itself here in a particular relation with the function of desire. (293)

As Lacan indicates, the second formula tells the story of all that he has been teaching in *Seminar V*, the idea that jokes manifest the crucial relationship with desire and linguistic demand. The D stands for demand and the A for the Other with the capital O—the locus of the signifiers in relation to the other *a*. The *s* in the formula shows the signified. The *s*(A) designates what the signified is in the Other, as Lacan says, “that is, what is the Other, for me as a subject, takes on the value of a signified—that is, what earlier I was calling insignias. It's in relation to these insignias of the Other that the identification occurs whose produce and outcome is the constitution of the big I, which is the ego-ideal in the subject,” (294). The admission to the identification of the ego-ideal will be conceivable once we take into account the Other. Like the second formula, the third one indicates a problem “in a reference chain [*chaîne-répère*].” (Ibid). In the fourth formula, the delta Δ refers to the relationship between the subject and the signifier. This subject is an enigmatic subject with all potential problems. The subject in the last formula expresses his desire through the demand in language. The S, like the big I, stands for the signifier. The fourth formula shows the signifiers' effects by elucidating the S, which is the signifier that the phallus Φ produces. The signifier of the phallus presents a lack in the Other. The fourth formula explains the implication of the phallus on the Other.

The relationship of man and desire is not a relationship with the object. If it were a mere object, man would be easily conceived as an animal with an object. Unlike animals, there is a second relationship in man, which man enjoys his desire, which shows a masochistic or sadistic aspect in extreme cases. Lacan singles out the existence of sadistic and scopophilic relations associated with desire. These aspects of the relationship show themselves in drive as partial desire. These drives are always substitutable. For example, scopophilia, which brings exhibition and voyeurism together, “the subject sees himself being seen, one sees the subject as seen, but, of course, one does not just see him, but one does not just see him, but sees him in his *jouissance*,” (295). The primary gap in a subject's relation with the object is responsible for such symptomatic rudiments. From this gape, masochism is the one that emerges in the analytic experience of desire. The subject, as such, finds himself as a suffering living being or the subject of desire. As that surplus pleasure, *jouissance* specifies the subject does not seek to satisfy a desire but obtains pleasure from the process of desiring itself. In other words, the desiring itself holds the prize of pleasure for a subject. This side of the fact is always manifested in what Lacan calls ‘existentialist investigation.’ Lacan alludes to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, which demonstrates this in different ways. Lacan sees the literary brilliance instead of a philosophical precision in the

revelations of Sartre's work. Such articulated manifestations of desire show itself better in a better way in the analytic experience, instead. The phobia concerning the phallic signifier that Jones experiences when trying to find an equivalent to the castration complex radiates his life as a writer and an analyst. From his first sentence, he wandered to find the phallic signifier in all the Oedipus complex drama.

The best of his writing, which culminates in his article on the phallic phase, consists precisely in saying this—why privilege this damned phallus that we find here under our feet at every moment, this inconsistent object, moreover, whereas other things are just interesting? (295-296)

Lacan goes further and argues that Jones was obsessed with the phallic phase in the determination of human sexuality, and the reason for this was that he titled his last essay, “the phallic phase.” That was also the reason that he coined the term *aphanasis*—(1948), a Greek term which implied for Jones the most potent fear in the subject “of losing all capacity for pleasure,” (Rycroft, 1972, 9). Jones envisioned that *aphanasis* has a more powerful effect on humans than the castration complex, for, in the castration complex, the ability to sexual enjoyment still exists despite losing the partial object. Nevertheless, *aphanasis* indicates that it is like death for the subject.

For Jones therefore, the common denominator in the sexuality of the boy and the girl has to be sought at a more fundamental level than the castration complex, that level being the gear of aphanasis. (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, 40)

Lacan's account of *aphanasis* is not a constant theme. Here in this seminar, his reading suggests that this loss of the sexual ability in boys and girls is nothing but eliminating the subject's desire. That is what the subject is frightened about in castration. Lacan upholds his position that the Greek term that *aphanasis* “means disappearance. The disappearance of what? The disappearance of desire. It's what the subject is afraid of in the castration complex, according to Mister Jones,” (Lacan, 2017, 296).

Lacan seems in *Seminar VIII: Transference* to confirm his theoretical position concerning the concept of *aphanasis*, which, according to Jones, “what is at work in castration complex is the fear aroused in the subject by the disappearance of desire,” (Lacan, 2015, 229). Similarly, in *Seminar VI: Desire and its Interpretation*, Lacan cites *aphanasis* as a discovery made by Jones in his clinical experience in his approach to the castration complex. Jones saw in his patients a sense of fearful feelings about the disappearance of their desire, but due to the lack of theoretical device, he fails to name it by its real name, as he says, “In a sense, he tells us that castration is the symbolization of the loss of desire, although he does not formulate it in this way, since he does not have the theoretical means by which to do so,” (Lacan, 2019, 196). In *Seminar X: Anxiety*, Lacan refers to the concept cursorily by admitting that Jones draws on this term to denote the phallus' as vanishing but stresses on the phallus as the mediator between the structuring of gender. Lacan makes a theoretical leap in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* as he brushes up on his position by arguing that what disappears in *aphanasis* is, in fact, the fading subject himself.

Ernest Jones, who invented it [*aphanasis*], mistook it for something rather absurd, the fear of seeing desire disappear. Now, *aphanasis* is to be situated in a more radical way at the level at which the subject manifests himself in this movement of disappearance that I have described as lethal. In a quite different way, I have called this movement the fading of the subject. (Lacan, 1994, 207-208)

Besides, the critical issue remains unsettled, and that is the relationship between the subject and the Other, “insofar as it’s in the Other, in the gaze of the Other, that he apprehends his own position. It’s not for nothing that I am singling out the scopophilic position,” (Ibid). According to Freud and Lacan, the other’s attitude towards the subject is more at stake, a mix of sadistic and masochistic attitudes, sadistic posture cannot exist without a masochistic identification. The problem here is the influence of the phallus in all this process. Lacan looks at the third formula to answer the role of the phallus in all that. As I hinted at the outset, Lacan is dealing with and explaining math, not in the way of a conventional teacher. His explanation is intriguingly coiled up. Before opening the third formula as he promises, he instantly reveals the second and all the other formulas. The subject has a relationship with the little other that Lacan calls this human desire. This desire is perverse, making all the subject’s demands marked by a relationship symbolized by the lozenge symbol $\langle \rangle$ in all the above three formulas. The demand to be of a substance necessitates a relationship between $s(A)$ and desire d structured like $A \langle \rangle d$. That requires us to look back at the first formula. Lacan suggests that all three formulas have an organization. The first formula means that “the narcissistic identification, namely what constitutes the subject’s ego, takes place in a certain relationship all of whose variations, differences and nuances we have seen over the course of time—prestige, presence, domination—in a certain relationship with the image of the other,” (297-298). We find the ego written to the other side of the double arrows \rightleftarrows in each formula’s middle. The ego’s existence is at the foundation of the subject’s primary relationship to the desire, expressed in the first part of the first formula, $d \rightarrow \Phi \langle \rangle a$. Meantime, Φ , the phallus is that signifier that structure the relationship between the little other a and the A (the Other) as the locus of speech (signifiers). In this process, the signifier plays an omnipresent role. The relationship with the signifier guarantees the entry of the subject to the order of culture and society. By its nature and power, the privileged phallus signifier permits all other signifiers’ play in the locus of the Other. Meantime, this privileged signifier represents the lack of the Other. In the third formula, the A , the symbol of the Other, is barred.

In sum, after recapping the theme of the last discussion, Lacan takes the issues of castration and the significance of the phallus with Jones and Freud. While endorsing the fundamental premises of their theories, he sees the lack of the signifier and structuralist linguistic for any flaws that could he find. Lacan introduces three formulas that of desire that some readers might find a little intimidating. He explains each of the formulae not as a mathematical backing for his arguments but as illustrating his theories about desire, the ego, the signifier, the Other, etc.

Noters:

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——(2015), *Seminar VIII: Transference*, tr. Bruce Fink, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Polity Press, Cambridge.

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Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, intro. Daniel Lagache, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Karnac Books, London.

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