

February 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

The Other in Hysteria and Obsessional Neurosis

The Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious. XVI

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At the outset, Lacan highlights the significance of the phallus as the signifier of the lack and desire. In his career until *Seminar V: (1957-1958)*, he sees this due to the evolving notion of the object analytical discourse. He draws the attention of his audience to the notion of the object relation in analytical practice and the specifications of the phallus he discovered in his theory. To this end, Lacan presents a list of articles authored by Maurice Bouvet on the notion of the object in the obsessional neurosis. The focal point of Bouvet in his writing has been the inclusion of an object or part object into the analytic dialogue. In Lacan's theory, this partial object is simply the privileged and the metonymic object he calls the phallus as a signifier. Before Bouvet, Melanie Klein took the object relation as rooted in a relationship between the subject and his object or part object. Drawing on Karl Abraham's concept of partial object-love, Klein gives weight to the idea of the object relation as the subjugation of the subject by his object.

The object articulates the subject's ways of his relation to his world. Lacan spells out that Bouvet's articles stress that in analysis, such a relation takes shape in a fantasy level between the analyst and the analysand or anyone who listened to him. In the author's experience, such a transference occurs in treating the obsessional neurosis through an analytical exchange. The analysand by an imaginary introjection of the phallus assigns the phallus to the analyst. The phallus in the analysand's fantasies has a dual allure in two phases. The subject's position vis-à-vis the phallus in the first phase of the fantasy has an aggressive and sadistic nature, which comes across in terms of horrific and dangerous events. In the second stage of the fantasy, the tendency arises for the annihilation of that object (the phallus). In this second stage, the object's autonomy as part-object (a particular form of the part-object) allowed.

A world can be established around this object—a world that isn't completely destined to be fundamentally destroyed by the stage immediately subjacent to the precarious equilibrium which the subject has achieved. The obsessional is effectively presented as always ready to lapse into the destruction of the world since, from the perspective from which the author expressed himself, one also thinks in terms of the subject's relationship to his environment. It is through maintaining the part object—maintenance that requires an entire scaffolding, which is precisely what constitutes obsessional neurosis—that the subject is said to avoid lapsing into a permanently threatening psychosis. This is what the author (Bouvet) considers to be the very basis of the problem. (Lacan, 2017, 368)

In Lacan's observation, Bouvet's conclusion about the transition from obsessional to psychosis never happens. Keeping in mind the psychoanalytic clinic, he argues that in obsessional, one can see 'parapsychotic symptoms' such as depersonalization that distract the ego and brings about feelings of the emptiness and meaninglessness of life and the world. Moreover, the transition to psychosis is very uncommon among those inflicted with obsessional neurosis. Bouvet claims that both nervous disturbances are incompatible with each other, which amounts to the understanding that in analysis, instead of curing the subject—obsessional neurosis—run the risk of transition into psychosis. Lacan calls this a fictitious suggestion that might happen exceptionally rare. He admits that in his own clinical experience, such a transition and even its risk never happened. Lacan recounts faithful to his theory as

demand, pure Other brings about all the laws for the constitution of the subject. The Other bars the phallus within itself and reduces it to the status of a signifier. The Other as castrated includes the message that comes from the Other as the subject's own message. In other words, the subject's own demand comes back to him as a message from the Other. This all is what Lacan calls the message of desire. The barred subject means that the complete human subject is not a pure subject of knowledge, which philosophy insisted on for ages and summed it up as an independent consciousness. Lacan puts it as, "a complete human subject is never a pure and simple subject of knowledge, as all of the philosophy constructs it, well and truly corresponding to the *percipiens* of this *perceptum* that is the world," (373). Here, Lacan insists that the perception is incompatible with the perceiver's perception, for the perceiver is also part of this perception. In other words, the one who perceives the *percipiens* is himself part of the world that he perceives *perceptum*.

The mental image we have of the world (called "perceptum," "what is seen") cannot just be understood in terms of measurable facts, since the perceiving subject himself (called "percipiens," "he who is seeing") is always part of the world he perceives. (Vanheule, 2011)

As such, Lacan condemns what philosophy defines human self-consciousness from a position of certainty. For Lacan, the human subject is first and foremost a divided subject and an alienated being by language. This self-alienation makes it impossible for him to understand himself fully. The idea of an ideal self-consciousness is meaningless because the truth is split knowledge as he stresses, "But as we are analysts, we know that there is always a *Spaltung*, that is, there are always two lines along which he is constituted. This, moreover, is where all our problems of structure originate," (373)

The two upper and lower parts of the graph revealed that the inarticulability of desire arises from the presence of the unconscious. These two parts in the graph also show that the subject's consciousness cannot articulate what is symbolized there because they are well-articulated already in the unconscious without his awareness, as hysterics show that what lies beyond their desire is the Other's desire.

Lacan points at the two loops: [the ego and the image of the ideal ego [m and i(a)] and desire (d) in the above graph in order to illustrate in topological terms the articulation of the subject's desire in the Other. In its unconscious function, this desire is the Other's desire that Lacan showed by analyzing the desire of hysterics in their dream in this seminar's earlier sessions. The hysteric desire found in the Other's desire a point of support for her own desire. That identifies a desire that remains beyond the demand. The demand has an indispensable kernel that stays as an insatiable leftover, sustaining itself in the metonymy of desire. In Lacan's observation, this essential point in his theory of the hysteric desire when analyzing the third dream of the lady dreamer introduced in the earlier sessions. He quotes from Freud and his comment: Standard Edition Volume 4, page 186-187.

She was putting a candle in a candlestick, but the candle broke so that it wouldn't stand up properly. The girls at her school said she was clumsy; but the mistress said it was not her fault.

And Freud's comment:

The occasion for the dream was a real event. The day before she had actually put a candle into a candlestick, though it did not break. If it won't stand up properly, it means that the man is impotent. It was not her fault, *Es sie nicht ihre Schuld...* But could a carefully

brought-up young woman, who had been screened from the impact of anything ugly, have known that a candle might be put to such use? (375)

Lacan states that the candle in the dream has that usual Freudian symbolic meaning as a signifier, and the fact that what it signifies is clear. The inclusion of the recent actual event as a stimulus to the dream that Freud insists on has another component. As Freud add to his comments, the dreamer listened on a boat trip a students' song about the Swedish Queen and Apollo's candle [a familiar brand of the candle at the time] behind a closed shutter.

Once when they were in a rowing boat on the Rhine, another boat had passed them with some students in it. They were in high spirits and were singing or rather shouting, a song:

*Wenn die Königin von Schweden,
Bei geschlossenen Fensterläden
Mit Apollokerzen..* (Freud, 2001, 187)

This experience finds an easy way to return to the structure of the dream. Lacan suggests that Apollo's candle is the phallus that reappears in a raw form and as a part object in the dream. The phrase, 'It was not her fault' has an obvious signifying value that hints at the Other and the Other's desire.

The symbol of the Other is evoked, and it corroborates and confirms—this is what I want to get to—what was already present in the dream called the dream by the butcher's beautiful wife, that is, that in hysteria, which is in short a mode of constitution of the subject precisely concerning her sexual desire, the stress is to be placed not only on the dimension of desire insofar as it's opposed to that of demand, but above all on the Other's desire, the position or the place of desire in the Other. (Lacan, 2017, 375-376)

The hysteric position between the two lines is the demand for love and the Other's desire, that a hysteric defines her subjectivity and desire. That is what Dora's symptoms illustrated in the previous session. Her symptoms must be seen in separation *Spaltung* of these two signifying lines. Lacan spells out that Dora keeps going as a subject when she loves, and in that love, she supports the Other's desire too.

That reveals a typical hysteric position. As stated in the previous session, Dora keeps her relationship with Frau K and her father through her identification with Herr K. Lacan illustrates this in what he calls a little square with four corners, representing the ego, the image of the other, the subject's relation to the imaginary other and desire. A hysteric subject keeps its relation with the imaginary other or specular image *i(a)* in a feeble way. That explains the difficulties of the hysteric subject with its mirror image or the imaginary other as a whole. In her symptoms, a hysteric demonstrates all kinds of disintegration and fragmentation with the other's image.

In obsessional neurosis, things are more complicated even though there are similarities between the two clinical entities: hysteria and obsession. Lacan criticizes Bouvet for not formulating the obsessional. He leaves the obsessional neurosis with a theoretical deficiency and does not postulate it in a single clinical description in his case studies. In clinical experience, the obsessional presents itself in a multiplicity that makes it difficult for an analyst to cut it into pieces. The critical issue for an obsessional is how he sustains himself as a subject? Before Freud, a French psychoanalyst, Pierre Janet found obsessional neurosis as a 'transformed' hysteria. Both hysteria and obsessional neurosis develop in correlation with desire. If we reduce desire from both entities, we will face difficulties to see uniformity within their neurosis. During

his study of these clinical forms of neurosis, Freud's final words are the issue of divergence between their 'primitive traumatism.' In the case of obsessional neurosis, the subject has a clear and potent role to play when it comes to pleasure. The pleasure, deriving from an extreme affective inconsistency. He observes this in his case history, the *Rat Man*, who suffered from a compulsive mania with a corporeal punishment of his loved ones by rats. Lacan rearticulates the case in his conceptual world as the primary approximation.

This was followed by all the developments in the *Rat Man*, namely the appearance of the extreme complexity of his affective relations, and notably the emphasis placed on affective ambivalence, the active-passive, masculine-feminine opposition and, most important thing of all, the love-hate antagonism. You must reread the *Rat Man* like the Bible, moreover. The case is rich with everything that still remains to be said on obsessional neurosis. (378)

In his clinical observation and meta-psychological theories, Freud has discovered at the core of effective ambivalence 'aggressive tendencies' demonstrating the distinction between life and death instincts as he states, "according to Freud, in the obsessional, there is a diffusion of the early intrications of life instincts and death instincts. The detachment as such of destructive tendencies took place at top early a stage in him for it not to have marked all his subsequent development and installation in his particular subjectivity." (Ibid)

Lacan sees such a process in the dialectic of the demand and desire, which he speaks about throughout the seminar. Such a see-saw can be identified daily in the analytical experience. It makes it difficult to distinguish between demand and desire in the discourse of the analysand. The destructive operation of the life and death instincts functions as the implication of neurosis on the obsessional—the object's destruction from a self-evident tendency with an obsessional subject.

As hinted earlier, the Other and the Other's desire plays a pivotal role with hysterics. The desire of the hysteric constitutes itself at the level of the Other. The aim of desire is beyond the demand, which lies at the constitution of the obsessional subject. By looking at a child who develops obsessional neurosis, we find that a young subject's desire shows his desire in the margins of a need. The margin consists between the need and an unconditional demand for love. The desire eliminates the otherness that involves the demand for love. The unconditionality of love indicates a pure form of a desire. Lacan typifies an obsessional child and his desire as always defined by psychologists as well. It is not difficult to understand that children often show fixation on particular objects. Psychoanalysis reads the signification of this fixation as a demand that carries in its margins an unconditional love that is the definitive origin of desire.

'He does have his fixed ideas [*idées fixes*].' The ideas he has are no more extraordinary than those of any other child, if we think about the things he demands. He will demand a little box. It's not such a big deal, a little box, and there are lots of children where one won't pause for a moment over this demand for a little box—except psychoanalysts, of course, who will find all sort of fine allusions here. In fact, they wouldn't be wrong, but I find it more important to see that there are some children. Amongst all children, who demand little boxes, and their parents find that this demand for a little box is strictly speaking intolerable—and it is intolerable. (379)

As said above, the demand for a little box is not just a self-conscious need for the child but holds an absolute condition with a link to desire. The parents who find the fixed idea

‘intolerable’ are also implicated in this drama of the child’s fixation. This absolute condition that the child fixation entails is negating the Other. The little box has become the child’s desire as an absolute need and absolute condition beyond the absolute condition for love. That varies for the obsessional and the hysteric. The hysteric attributes her desire to the Other’s desire and seeks her desire as such.

On the other hand, the obsessional “put his desire before everything else, that means that he seeks it in a beyond by aiming for it as such in its constitution as desire, that is, insofar as it destroys the Other. That is the secret of the profound contradiction between the obsessional and his desire” (380). Meantime, Lacan criticizes Klein and Bouvet, who considered the obsessional desire as “instantaneous toing-and-froing between introjection and projection” (Ibid). Lacan argues that the introjection [a symbolic fact related to signifiers] and projection [an imaginary fact related to the images] are different and cannot function in a single process. He goes on further in *Seminar VIII: Transference*, where he identifies the obsessional desire as “impossible desire” and the desire of the hysteric as “unsatisfied desire,” (Lacan, 2015, 366). What Lacan insists on here is the primacy of desire for the obsessional subject. For the support of his desire, he does not defend it on the Other. The compulsion in the obsessional is a defensive action against castration of the Other. As such, Freud’s case history *Rat Man* was a matter of an open observation for Lacan. The *Rat Man* develops the ritual of an imagined punishment for his father. This disturbing punishment that he re-enacts at any minute is, in fact, the dynamic of his desire. Joël Dor is right when he argues in *The Clinical Lacan* that desire runs faster than the obsessional who “permits himself to come under the influence of his desire, with all its attendant *jouissance*.” (Dor, 1999, 46)

In conclusion, I have to admit that this session is the most inaccessible part of the seminar. Lacan’s dizzying style of expression reached a crescendo by a barrage of conceptual and theoretical convergences, ellipses, and allusions. Lacan begins by observing the post-Freudian understanding of the object concerning the desire to reveal the premise of his own theory of the phallus as the signifier of the lack. Since this lack is also correlated with desire, the phallus is the signifier of desire as well. The post-Freudian object represents the phallus because the object can be considered only insofar as it lacks. The fixation on the object that the analytical discourse demonstrates proves the primacy of the signifier of the phallus. As the signifier, the phallus signifies the Other’s desire. In its function as the signifier of the Other’s desire, the phallus plays a crucial role in the aetiology of hysteria and obsessional neurosis. From this point, Lacan proceeds to expand his issues of hysteria and obsessional neurosis concerning the Other. The hysteric desire seeks the Other’s desire as a defence and support, while the obsessional tries to destroy the Other by captivating himself by an impossible desire. In both cases, desire is constituted unconsciously. That is why in its manifestations in both cases remains as an absolute condition for love and as beyond. We understand from Lacan’s proverbial difficulty expression here is that both ways of desires—hysteric and obsessional—must be understood as a defensive action against the unconscious urges on the part of the ego. The obsessional desire, as in *Hamlet*, reveals itself in deranged thoughts, procrastination, intensive melancholia, inaction. By contrast, the hysteric shows her desire in the other person’s desire, the other of the mirror stage as Lacan showed in the dreams of the hysterical Freudian case histories. Lacan may well be simplified in his description of the hysterics and obsessional as follows:

Neurosis is an inadequate way of defending ourselves, the inappropriate means that we knowingly employ to confront an unconscious and dangerous pleasure. In so doing we defend ourselves inefficiently because, in order to soothe intolerable pain, we have no recourse other than to transform it into neurotic suffering, into symptoms...suffering in the *hysterical* manner in suffering consciously in the body, that is, converting unconscious

and unbearable pleasure into bodily suffering...suffering neurotically in the *obsessional* manner in suffering consciously in one's thinking, that is, displacing unconscious and intolerable pleasure into the suffering of thoughts. (Nasio, 1997, 11)

Notes:

Dor, Joël, (1999), *The Clinical Lacan*, ed. Judith Feher Gurewich in collaboration with Susan Fairfield, Other Press, New York.

Freud, Sigmund, (2001), *The Interpretation of Dreams (First Part)*, collaborates with Anna Freud, tr. James Strachey, *The S E of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IV*, Vintage Books, London.

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Nasio, Juan-David, (1997), *Hysteria: The Splendid Child of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Susan Fairfield, forward. Paul Ornstein, Jason Aronson Inc., New Jersey.

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