

Presentation of Book VI
of the Seminar of Jacques Lacan
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... continuation*

THERE are seven lessons on *Hamlet*, which I'm not going to go into. It is clear that on this occasion, Lacan is widening the concept of the object *a* beyond the imaginary other, that he is affirming that 'a whole chain, an entire scenario', can be set into the fantasy.¹

At the same time, he acknowledges the object as the 'structural element of the perversions', which on page 373 opens onto the clinical distinction between fantasy in neurosis and in perversion. The criterion that Lacan foregrounds is 'time'. The fantasy in perversion is 'outside time', so to say, to simplify matters, whilst the fantasy in neurosis is, on the contrary, underpinned by the subject's relation to time. In this case 'the object takes charge of the signification [...] of the hour of truth'.² This is what appears in the well-known phenomenon of Hamlet's procrastination.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

² *Ibid.*, p. 373.

In *Hamlet*, and throughout the lessons on *Hamlet*, the fantasy is indicated as the term of the subject's question, as the locus at which the subject's question about his desire finds its response, that is, as the *nec plus ultra* of desire. This is where Lacan determines the locus at which, for him, the end of analysis will be played out when later he will define the Pass. There is a certain paradox in the fact that, in our clinic, the term fantasy has found itself in some sense effaced, when at the same time people are so enthusiastic when it comes to identifying and ascertaining the end of analysis, as though, through some cleft, the question of the fantasy were being reserved for the end of analysis and the side of the clinic were to be obliterated. This is the locus at which, for Lacan, the end of analysis will be played out when he will define the Pass as the solution to the subject's essential impasse in his relation to the signifier.

In *Hamlet*, you can also see the fantasy playing an essential role. There are two characters who come to play the role of object *a*: the character you would expect to, Ophelia, the sublime object of desire, who afterwards oscillates into the fallen object; but also Laertes, her brother. Lacan accentuates and punctuates the moment at which this brother, having jumped into the grave that has been dug for his sister, is joined by Hamlet and confronts him as though he were the double of this character. In other words, you have to re-read these seven lessons on *Hamlet* which are framed by these two quintessential points of emergence of the fantasy.

From Diachrony to Synchrony: The Object of the Cut

THE last section, which is made up of eight chapters, allows us to grasp what Lacan has brought to us here. Indeed, in chapter XX, the first of this final section, on 'The Fundamental Fantasy', he explains that this is a limit to interpretation such as he himself had set it out in the conclusion to his article on 'The Direction of the Treatment...', namely: 'any exercise of interpretation possesses a character of cross-referencing from wish to wish'. We have a succession of desire, and this is what has remained from analyses, for example the dream of the butcher's beautiful wife, and so on, it is precisely the effect of an indefinite cross-referencing of desire.

What is taken up in *Seminar VI* is the question of how to interpret desire if desire is essentially metonymic. Now, what he had set down in the text 'The Direction of the Treatment...', which is the text onto which this seminar is grafted, was that in actual fact desire doesn't have an object, strictly speaking. This desire, such as it features in 'The Direction of the Treatment...', such as it makes up the fifth and final part of this article, is defined, I quote, as 'the metonymy of the want-of-Being.'³ Prior to *Seminar VI*, desire was laid out precisely as something that is utterly insubstantial, whilst being the repercussion of a lack. This is why Lacan had insisted on Leonardo's oft-cited image of Saint John, with his finger raised pointing upwards to an elsewhere.⁴ This brought us to a halt on one definition of interpretation: that to interpret is to point elsewhere, and that therefore allusion is the privileged enunciative mode of interpretation. This is precisely what this seminar, *Le désir et son interprétation*, is designed to discourage and dispute, by postulating on the contrary that desire implies

³ Lacan, J., 'The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power', *op. cit.*, p. 520 [Translation modified].

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 536.

a relation to the object by way of the fantasy and that, in this seminar, it is possible to interpret the fantasy. It is even the case that fantasy is itself the interpretation of desire, on the condition that one starts off from the diachrony of desire, from succession, whilst all the while gathering it up in synchrony. This is the value of the formula: barred S, lozenge, capital D.

Lacan posits these two registers, diachrony and synchrony. One can clearly see that he has privileged the metonymic aspect of desire, but he complements it with synchrony which is articulated in the relation between the barred subject and the object *a*. So, if I refer you to page 446, you will find there the logic of the fantasy such as it is unpacked and articulated in this seminar. First, the subject meets an articulated void in the Other. This void is the emptiness defined by negation: there is no Other of the Other. This refutes a category that had been created in *Seminar V*,⁵ and leaves the subject without any nominative bearings. Second, 'the subject brings in [...] from the imaginary register, something of a part of himself in so far as it is engaged in the imaginary relation to the other', in the specular relation with the little other. Third, this object has a 'stand-in' function in relation to the essential failing of the signifier. This is when Lacan turns his attention to what is strictly the structure of the subject and he finds it in the gap in the signifying chain, in the cut.⁶ The cut will be the last word of this seminar.

What must surely be a surprise, however, for anyone who has grasped the coherence of Lacan's construction up to this point, is that in chapter XXII, when Lacan is questioning anew the nature of the object *man* that corresponds to a subject-cut, he brings in the pre-genital object which throughout the entire seminar has been utterly absent from the fantasmatic register.⁷ Throughout the seminar, the pre-genital object has been left to the drive and essentially considered as a signifier. Here, it is met again in its involvement in the fantasy as the object of a cut, and this is a sensational change of direction which Lacan gives to the orientation of the seminar, quite as though this were nothing at all. We discover not only that this object *a* is rooted in the imaginary, but that it is also the weaned breast as a cut object; the excrement that is cut and ejected from the body; to which Lacan adds the voice, and especially the broken-off voice; along with all the objects of phallic structure that are implicated in the cut-structure by means of mutilation and stigmatisation. Thus, in a surprising way, and, by the same token, with a cutting effect, we see at the end of chapter XXII the real making a return, because with the pre-genital objects which here are the objects of fantasy, Lacan poses the question as to what these pre-genital objects are: 'what are these here objects of the fantasy, if not real objects?'⁸ So there you have it, in one fell swoop a new orientation is set and he points out that they are real objects that stand 'in a close relationship with [the subject's] vital drive.'

Lacan will never come back to this, but this is where he is already introducing the function of jouissance that paves the way for the function whose construction he will account for two years after this seminar when he will posit that the unconscious '*I*

⁵ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre V, Les formations de l'inconscient, 1957-1958*, Paris: Seuil, 1998, p. 464.

⁶ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation, op. cit.*, p. 451.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 452-4, p. 469.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

lies at the level of *jouissance*. Setting off from here, Lacan studies with a clinical precision that has no equal elsewhere the perverse fantasy in the *passage à l'acte* of the exhibitionist and voyeur⁹, and he compares it with what constitutes the fantasy in the neurotic¹⁰.

The last word of the seminar is the cut that would be, so says Lacan, 'the most effective mode of analytic interpretation', provided it is not 'mechanical'.¹¹ The cut is also what forms the join between the symbolic and the real, just as at the start of the seminar, the fantasy was assigned the role of forming the join between symbolic and imaginary. For Lacan, this is a way of tying things back in with the start of his teaching, with the seminar dedicated to 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' and the structure of the signifying chain, in which it was already apparent that the symbolic meets its foundation in the cut.¹² Simultaneously, the end of the seminar on desire opens onto the seminar on ethics, which will find its point of departure in the instant of the real. This is also a seminar that will take as read the formed join between fantasy and drive, the condition for the emergence of the instance of *jouissance* as such.

The Reshaping of Established Conformity

I SHALL end by reading a passage from the last chapter of the seminar on desire, which echoes strangely what is happening before our very eyes this year, namely the 'reshaping of established conformity, if not its very sundering'¹³. This is why it didn't strike me as excessive to present this seminar by writing that, despite the half century that separates us, it 'speaks of us', today.¹⁴ Here is the extract that I shall read in conclusion to this presentation of *Seminar VI*, in this setting where I believe I have been speaking to readers of Lacan. From page 569:

If there is one experience that ought to teach us just how problematic these social norms are, to what extent they need to be questioned, to what extent they are determined elsewhere than in their adaptive function, then it is precisely the analyst's experience.

In the experience we have of our logical subject we uncover a dimension which is always latent, but which is always present as well, in any inter-subjective relationship. This dimension, the dimension of desire, lies in a relationship of interaction, of exchange, with everything that from this crystallises in the social structure. If we know how to take this into account, we ought to be able to move forward, more or less, to the following conception.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 492-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 497 & chapter XXIV.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

¹² Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, translated by S. Tomaselli, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 284 & 291 [where *coupure temporelle* is rendered as 'temporal break'].

¹³ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation, op. cit.*, p. 571.

¹⁴ Miller, J.-A., presentation of *Livre VI* on the back cover.

What I denote with the word *culture* – a word which I don't particularly value, if at all – is a certain history of the subject in his relationship with the *logos*. This instance, the relationship to the *logos*, has most certainly remained masked in the course of time, and, in our day, it is hard not to see the gap it represents, the distance which separates it from a certain social inertia. [...]

Something of what we call *culture* passes over into society. We may provisionally define the relationship between them as a relationship of entropy in so far as what passes from culture to society always includes some function of disintegration.

That which in society presents itself as culture – and which has thus entered, in various different capacities, into a certain number of stable conditions, which are also latent, which determine the circuits of exchange within the flock – establishes a movement there, a dialectic, which leaves wide open the same gap as the one in whose interior we locate the function of desire. It is in this sense that we can posit that what is produced by way of perversion reflects, at the level of the logical subject, the protest against that which the subject undergoes at the level of identification, in as much as identification is the relationship that establishes and orders the norms of the social stabilisation of different functions.

[...]

In sum, we might say that something is established as a cyclical circuit between, on the one hand, the conformism, or socially conforming forms, of the activity that is called cultural – here the term is quite excellent for defining everything that is traded and alienated by way of culture in society – and, on the other hand, [any structure that is similar to that of] perversion, in as much as perversion represents, at the level of the logical subject, the protest that, in the eyes of conformity, rises up in the dimension of desire, in so far as desire is the subject's relation to his Being.

Here Lacan promises to speak later about sublimation. This will be in the seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. He concludes on page 571, saying:

Sublimation is poised as such at the level of the logical subject, at which everything that is, strictly speaking, *creative labour* in the order of the *logos* is established and unfurled. Thereafter, cultural activities come to be more or less inserted into society, to find their place more or less at the social level, with all the repercussions and all the risks that they entail, up to and including the reshaping of previously established conformity, if not its very sundering.

Today is 26 May 2013, and, as you will see on your way out, Paris is indeed living through a reshaping of previously established conformity, its sundering¹⁵, and this is precisely what Lacan was heralding already a half century ago.

Thank you.

Translated from the French by A. R. Price

¹⁵ [TN, On 17 May 2013, the French Parliament passed Bill 2013-404 opening the right to homosexual marriage in France. The first ceremony took place on 29 May. The public protests in opposition to the bill on Sunday 26 May were among the largest and most violent.]