

Presentation of *Book VI*  
of the Seminar of Jacques Lacan \*

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THIS is a book which, in the edition I have just got my hands on, numbers some 600 pages and is divided into twenty-four chapters.<sup>1</sup> Given this heftiness, it would be hard to produce a digest of this book, especially when everything that is precious about it is to be found in the analyses of details. Besides, as is the case for other Books of the Seminar, this book is not a treatise. It does not constitute a finished conception. This is not a text whose end is contemporary with its start. It is a text that asks to be read in taking account of its temporal dimension, which is made up of a series of weekly talks spread across a full university year. Therefore, from one lesson to the next, there are advances, corrections, and shifts in perspective, that need to be pointed out and noted on each occurrence. Furthermore, Lacan gives formulas which are sometimes incisive and sound definitive, but which he

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation, 1958-1959*, Paris: Éditions de La Martinière/Le Champ freudien, 2013.

will never mention again in either a seminar or written text. So, the question each time for the reader is whether what is being read is a nugget, a term that is worth highlighting, sharing, and developing, or whether, on the contrary, it's an aside, a shift that will be rectified later.

As I was flicking through the seminar again, this time in the shape of this book, I realised the extent to which this question could be posed for several sentences, and for some individual words too. Whenever Lacan defines a term in a way that will remain unique, should we accentuate it in our reflection? Is it to be reiterated because Lacan is drawing back the veil on some overlooked aspect, or is it rather a shift, a slide, that will be rectified afterwards? Moreover, the exercise of reading a seminar, for the one who is reading it, for the one who is drafting it – being the one who drafted it, I still have to read it over – is a matter of finding out from one time to the next how the perspective transforms, how it shifts, and how the rectifications, which more often than not are fully discernable, are performed.

So, from this mass of signifiers, I'm going to draw a thread, just one. At the start of the Seminar this thread is extremely fine and is lost in a tangle, but as the development progresses it thickens out until, in the end, it becomes a rope that one cannot fail to recognise. This thread is the thread of the fantasy.

### **The First Logic of the Fantasy**

THE Seminar is titled *Le désir et son interprétation*, desire and its interpretation, and indeed it is in the question of the interpretation of desire that it finds its point of departure. As the Seminar progresses, however, it turns out to be something quite different. It transforms continuously. It changes shape without producing a rent, as do topological figures, and in the end it yields an appreciably different configuration, even a very different configuration, with respect to the opening one. Other books of the like are unheard of. At least for the time being, I can't think of anything that compares to it. There are comparable books among the books of Lacan's *Seminar*, but all the same this is a very special kind of book.

To go more quickly I shall say that this Seminar develops the first logic of the fantasy that Lacan constructed. Later came *Seminar XIV* which bears the title *La Logique du fantasme* and this second logic, the 'true' one, as it were, leans on Lacan's article 'Position of the Unconscious', which I must suppose many of you here have studied. Lacan also commented on this in his eleventh seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, on the basis of the alienation and separation couple.<sup>2</sup> In a note to the *Écrits*, Lacan points out that the text 'Position of the Unconscious' constitutes the complement and almost the re-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book IX, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, translated by A. Sheridan, Harmondsworth: Penguin, Chapter 16, pp. 203-15.

launch<sup>3</sup> of what he had opened with his inaugural text 'Function and Field of Speech and Language...'. I once asked myself exactly what eminent value Lacan accorded to 'Position of the Unconscious', a text which was drafted just as he was delivering his eleventh seminar and which is included in the seminar itself in the commentaries he gives.

*Seminar VI*, as the first logic of the fantasy, takes the same line as 'Function and Field of Speech and Language...', and it becomes progressively more focussed in the formula of the fantasy that Lacan gives: barred S, lozenge, *a*. Here at the outset we can complete the word 'fantasy' by adding an adjective that is essentially slotted into its due place in chapter XX, on page 434. When Lacan puts forward this expression in chapter XX, it had already featured in his writings, in particular in the text that came just before *Seminar VI*, namely 'The Direction of the Treatment...'<sup>4</sup>. This text is a paper that was delivered in July 1958, and Lacan began *Seminar VI* in November of that same year. So, *Seminar VI* continues the theme of 'The Direction of the Treatment...'. In particular, it continues the conclusion of the text which bears precisely on the interpretation of desire.<sup>5</sup> *Seminar VI* gets under way by following this same line. What had been affirmed at the end of the written text is problematised at the start of *Seminar VI*, which takes up the baton. Lacan concludes his article and, following the same line, he opens the question again and, precisely, displaces it. In 'The Direction of the Treatment...' there are already two instances of the expression 'fundamental fantasy'<sup>6</sup>, which as yet, in this text, has no precision. The precision only comes in *Seminar VI*. The expression 'the fundamental fantasy' struck me as deserving to be hoisted up as the title for chapter XX. 'The fundamental fantasy' is only uttered in the singular. Lacan does not trade on the form 'fundamental fantasies'. When it appears in his teaching, it is pitched in the singular.

In what sense is it fundamental? This is a question which I once asked myself and which we asked ourselves in a work group. At the time we didn't have at our disposal a text that would allow us to settle what value the adjective 'fundamental' should be given. So, in what sense is it fundamental? I think we are now in a position to reply. It is fundamental in as much as it is minimal, that is, it is written with the two terms of the formula, along with the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lacan, J., 'Position of the Unconscious' in *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by B. Fink, R. Grigg, & H. Fink, London/New York: Norton & Co., 2006, p. 721, endnote 4: '...this sequel to my Rome discourse...'

<sup>4</sup> Lacan, J., 'The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power' in *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English, op. cit.*, p. 513. [TN, As Lacan's note to the 1961 publication indicates, the paper was delivered at the Royaumont Colloquium on 10-13 July, 1958, but later re-worked over Easter 1960 in anticipation of the print edition.]

<sup>5</sup> 'Part V: Desire Must be Taken Literally', in *ibid.*, pp. 518-537.

<sup>6</sup> [TN, For the second instance, *cf.*, p. 532: '...in its fundamental use, [the] fantasy is the means by which the subject maintains himself at the level of his vanishing desire...'.]

double-entry relationship that links these two terms. This relationship is a double-entry relationship because it can be read in both directions. These two terms and the double-entry relationship that links them are supposed to provide the minimal structure of the fantasy. It seems to me that one can say that it is a minimal structure of the fantasy in the sense that Lacan will later provide the minimal structure of the signifying chain by writing:  $S_1-S_2$ . Comparing these two structures is all the more justifiable when you consider that Lacan will group them together and articulate them in the formula for the master discourse, this being the point of departure, the framework, for the quartet of his discourses.<sup>7</sup> Even prior to this memorable notation of the master discourse, this couple of minimal terms are already being joined up in *Seminar XI*.<sup>8</sup>

### **Distinction Between the Drive and the Object Relation**

ALSO on page 434, Lacan presents this minimal formula as 'the true form of the claimed Object Relation'. This is no hapax. It is said not once but many times throughout this seminar. The true Object Relation that was the theme of Lacan's *Seminar IV* is to be found at the level of the fantasy. This is an assertion that ought not to be admitted as something self-evident. It means that, in Lacan's sense, the Object Relation does not lie at the level of the drive.

Why so? Why, in the end, at this date, is there not, so it seems to me, any drive object strictly speaking in Lacan? Well, because at this date, in the development of his teaching, the drive has the status of demand. Demand that is all the more imperative given that it is unconscious. As demand, it is not attached to objects but to signifiers. On this point, there are sometimes variations in Lacan, but I think I can safely say that the drive in *Seminar VI*, and in 'The Direction of the Treatment...' as well, designates an unconscious relation to the signifier and not to the object.

The relation to the object lies not at the level of the drive, but at the level of desire, and this is due to the intermediary of the fantasy. So it is that, on his graph, Lacan makes the drive the vocabulary, or more precisely the *code* - this is the term he's using at that time - of unconscious demand. This is written barred S, lozenge, capital D, whereas the fantasy is barred S, lozenge, *a*, the latter term being the object. In other words - and this is somewhat curious for those who follow closely the course of Lacan's teaching and who have sometimes started with his late teaching - with the drive as such, when one reads *Seminar VI*, one never leaves the realm of the signifier. It is only with desire that one has a relation to the object, by way of the fantasy.

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<sup>7</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*, translated by R. Grigg, London/New York: Norton & Co., 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book IX, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

In a certain sense, I believe that so long as Lacan only allows of imaginary objects, there is an object strictly speaking only in the fantasy. This page only turns at the end of *Seminar VI*. At the same time as the page turns, Lacan casts aside his two-storey graph which supposes this gap between drive and fantasy. So long as Lacan only allows of imaginary objects, objects that stem from the mirror-stage, objects that are derived from the image of the other, that is, the image of one's own body, the object at stake is the object of the fantasy. So, the difficulty for those who will read *Seminar VI* but who have been trained in Lacan's later teaching is that their reading and study will have to be poised at a level that includes this seminar's development in the gap between drive and fantasy, which is even a gap of such scale that the fantasy eclipses the drive.

Only at the end of the seminar does Lacan effect a kind of change of direction by means of a sudden movement that occurs roundabout chapter XXII. In the wake of this change of direction we start to see the drive being restored to its rightful place. An object is evoked that is a real object, the object as real, and this will remain so barely accentuated that, even in his fourteenth seminar, *La logique du fantasme*, or maybe it's in the thirteenth, *L'objet de la psychanalyse*, I haven't had time to check, Lacan was to surprise his audience by saying that the status of the object *a* is real. Its status is real and this features already, if you like, in these few lines from *Seminar VI*.

In the end, this shift is such that it was not noticed by Lacan's audience, and he did not consolidate it since his conception of the object during those years was so firmly rooted in the imaginary, precisely in the specular relation, the mirror-stage, the relation between the ego and the little other. Therefore, what we can note with respect to this shift was only to be unpacked and sanctioned many years later.

Obviously I'm taking you back to another era, that is, to the very foundation of our discourses. I don't know if I'm exaggerating when I say, for example, that the term 'fantasy', in our colloquium, when it could have been summoned up by many of the clinical evocations we have heard, has, on the contrary, almost fallen by the wayside, or so we would be forgiven for thinking. This means that this seminar should not be read merely as the testimony to a bygone era, but that perhaps we should find here some of the foundations of our approach. We might sometimes find how to endue our present-day clinical evocations with colour and precision. It is quite certain that, with respect to what I heard of the debates on gender and the gender-change aspirations that some subjects harbour, which as François Ansermet quite rightly observed betray a certitude – indeed, there are, so to speak, fifty shades of certitude, to echo the title of the novel – it is quite certain that, to specify these shades, it would be very useful to refer to the fantasy to make our constructions more precise.

Later on, it was by virtue of an inverse movement that: the drive was to find its rightful place and to be subjoined to the fantasy; the object was to be

acknowledged as belonging to the register of the real; and, in Lacan's late teaching, fantasy and drive were to be fused in the *sinthome* as a mode of jouissance. In other words, the dance that I'm sketching out between fantasy and drive is the great future in Lacan's teaching, to the point that the two terms were to fuse in Lacan's use of the term *sinthome*. So, when one has been introduced to Lacan through his late teaching, one has to make an effort to accommodate the view on *Seminar VI*, and to be able to be taught by the perspective that it offers on the experience of desire.

### Trauma and Defence in the Experience of Desire

'THE experience of desire' is a term that Lacan uses in the seminar.<sup>9</sup> So that this doesn't remain something vague, I shall give a first example of this.

The first example is the subject's recourse to the fantasy when he is contending with the opacity of the desire of the big Other. This opacity, this illegibility, has the effect of the Freudian *Hilflosigkeit*, the subject's distress. This is when the subject turns to the fantasy as a defence. This is said just once in the seminar, but this one time needs to be highlighted. The subject turns to the fantasy as a defence, that is, the subject draws on the resources of the mirror-stage that offers him a range of stances, from triumph to submission, and then, so says Lacan on page 29, the subject 'defends himself with his ego'. It is this experience that allows us to speak about the use of the fantasy that we have taken up since then. It needs to be seen that this takes root precisely in this point: the use of the fantasy as a defence when faced with the opacity of the Other. This experience allows us to speak about the use of the fantasy because it is commandeered, strictly speaking, so as to ward off distress. What in this seminar Lacan calls 'the traumatic experience'<sup>10</sup> remains marked by the recourse to the fantasy.

In the documents that they have circulated in preparation for the forthcoming ECF Study Days on the theme of 'trauma', Christiane Alberti and Marie-Hélène Brousse have provided a list of references to trauma in *Seminar VI*. Since at that time I had the seminar on my computer, with all the chapters in the same file, I was able to perform a simple word search for 'trauma' and send them the list of occurrences. So, given that there is ample time between now and the Study Days for the participants to read *Seminar VI*, we can count on them to give the fantasy its rightful place with respect to trauma, and in particular the use of fantasy as a defence. I've been told that all of the 500 copies that were brought here direct from the printer's - since they are not available yet in any bookshops in France - have been sold. We can count on this interest being maintained for Lacan's constructions from earlier periods because, at the end of the day, Lacan's fresh constructions do not cancel out

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<sup>9</sup> Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation*, op. cit., p. 25, p. 461, & p. 559.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the older ones, they extend them. Sometimes, however, new perspectives level off the relief that the former perspectives emphasised, and I think that this is the case concerning the fantasy. Even though the fantasy was launched afresh in the fourteenth seminar, *La logique du fantasme*, this is a term – and I believe our colloquium has been probative on this matter – that has rather fallen by the wayside, but which will be restored to its former hue after the study of this seminar, in any case, after the thread that I am offering.

### **The Panic Point and the Imaginary Object**

I SHALL compare this passage from page 29 with another from page 108, where Lacan singles out what he calls the subject's 'panic point'. Here, the term *point* is not the French negation. A 'point' denotes what is obtained when two lines intersect. This 'panic point' of the subject is the point, so says Lacan, at which the subject is 'effaced [...] behind a signifier'. This effacement should not be understood as an identification but as an erasure: it is the point at which he can no longer say anything about himself, at which he is reduced to silence. This is when he clasps onto the object of desire. It is the same logic of the fantasy that is operative at the level of the unconscious where the subject has no possibility of designating himself, or where he is faced with his namelessness as a subject. This is when he turns to the fantasy, and it is in his relation to the object of desire that the truth of his Being resides.

*Seminar VI* explores a seldom explored field which lies beyond the signifier and which is designated as the field of the fantasy. Lacan says that it is articulated on the basis of a conciliation between the symbolic and the imaginary.<sup>11</sup> This conciliation is brought to the fore in the very notation: barred S, lozenge, *a*. The object *a* comes from the imaginary, it is borrowed from the mirror-stage, from the mirroring of the specular relation, whilst the subject, barred S, is the subject of the signifier, the subject of speech. Thus, Lacan's two elements are reconciled here. We know that later, in *Seminar IX* on *Identification*, Lacan will provide a topological articulation of this adjoining of heterogeneous elements, but we can say that, in reference to Lacan's later teaching, this field of the fantasy functions as an aspect of the real. The term 'real' will progressively make its presence felt in the latter part of the seminar.

This is quite clearly the case in the first part of the seminar which is essentially devoted to the analysis of the famous 'dream of the dead father'. I'll just remind you of the text of this dream, which Freud first included in his 'Formulations on the Two Principles...'<sup>12</sup> and then integrated into *The Interpretation of Dreams*.<sup>13</sup> The father is still alive, he is speaking to his son, the dreamer. The son *felt it exceedingly painful that his father had really died, only*

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Freud, S., 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning [1911]', translated by M. N. Searl & J. Strachey, in *S.E. XII*, London: Hogarth, pp. 213-26.

<sup>13</sup> [TN, The dream was added to the 1911 edition of the *Traumdeutung*.]

*without knowing it.* Lacan goes into the details of how Freud treats the dream through the signifier, transposing it onto his graph. Freud interprets the dream by restoring the clauses that he deems to have been elided from the text of the dream, in particular the famous 'as he wished'.

We have Freud's treatment of the dream as taken up by Lacan, and then Lacan's treatment of the same. Lacan essentially treats the dream through the object and not through the signifier. As you will see in particular on page 75, in treating the dream through the object, he implies the fantasy in the dream. He poses the question as to what this structured scenario between father and son might be: 'Is it a fantasy?' he wonders. Other questions are likewise laid out, but a reply is given to this one. Lacan says, and once only, that, 'effectively it is a fantasy'. He states that we find ourselves before 'a dream fantasy'. Lacan is thus led, in the interpretation of the dreamer, not to advance into a signifying analysis, but to take on board the imaginary representation that the dream offers and to qualify it as a fantasy, a category of fantasy which is the 'dream fantasy'. He admits that a fantasy has passed into the dream.

This makes sense precisely because we are at the level of imaginary representations, to the extent that Lacan says that this fantasy can maintain the same structure and the same signification in another context, no longer that of *Verneinung* but that of *Verwerfung*, no longer than of negation but that of foreclosure, no longer that of the dream but that of psychosis.<sup>14</sup> In other words, we have here the beginnings of a gradation, a range of hues of the fantasy, in which you have the dream fantasy but also the psychosis fantasy. *Mutatis mutandis*, he gives the following striking example: in psychosis, this would be the feeling of being with someone who is dead, but who doesn't know it. In other words, there the fantasy unit can be displaced from dream to psychosis. Lacan even adds that, after all, one can meet this in everyday life when one frequents people who are 'mummified' and whom one senses do not know it, but who are already at the end. One can imagine that he has in mind those who at the time were his adversaries in psychoanalysis.

The conclusion of the Freudian interpretation is that the dream is clearly an Oedipal dream and the ultimate wish of an Oedipal dream bears a relation to the father: 'it's the wish for the father's castration'.<sup>15</sup> Well, not at all! This conclusion is not Lacan's conclusion, because he considers that the fantasy conceived of as the ultimate response to the panic point goes beyond the Oedipal wish. One can see that the Oedipus complex is still in the field of the signifier, and that Lacan thinks that with the fantasy one touches on the beyond of what is at stake, even in the Oedipus complex. You can read this on page 118. He says, 'the fantasy, here, goes far beyond the Oedipal wish.' More quintessential and much deeper than the son's suffering is his confrontation with the image of the father as rival, as imaginary fixation. In other words, the ultimate interpretation points towards the fantasy, towards the irreducible

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<sup>14</sup> Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation, op. cit.*, pp. 76-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.



presence of the image. One can say that this function of the remainder is precisely the index of the real with which this image is affected. We may say that there is always in the subject a 'panic point' in so far as there is an essential impasse in the subject's relation to the signifier which means, and here I'm quoting Lacan, that, 'there is no other sign of the subject but the sign of his abolition as a subject'.<sup>16</sup> And this is why he clasps to the imaginary object.

### **Dialectic Between Dream and Fantasy**

THE second part of the seminar is made up of a reading of a dream analysed by the English psychoanalyst Ella Sharpe. There you meet a dialectic between dream and fantasy. I shall just remind you of the episode that precedes the analysis of the dream and how the dream was related to the analyst. For some time, the subject has been letting out a cough just before entering the analyst's consulting room.<sup>17</sup> I'm referring to pages 181-2.

The subject reports a fantasy he has had<sup>18</sup>, and Lacan does indeed confirm that it has the status of a fantasy. 'What has to be analysed...', says Lacan, '...is the fantasy, and without understanding it, that is, by uncovering the structure that it reveals.'<sup>19</sup> In chapter X, proceeds to a methodical reading of the fantasy and the dream, and he finds a symmetrical and inverse structure between fantasy and dream. This is on pages 211-2.

This dialectic of fantasy and dream is that much weightier given that, on page 269, he observes that one can distinguish between the level of the fantasy and the level of the dream. 'One can also say that there is a fantasy on both sides, the dream fantasies and those of the waking dream'. In other words, the expression 'dream fantasy' is met a second time here, and this is what I'm inviting you to find in your reading. This dialectic between dream and fantasy makes for the specificity of the dream analyses that we find in this seminar and which sets them quite apart from those that we meet in *Seminar V*, for instance. The originality of these dream interpretations is that they imply the fantasy, and moreover this singular category of the fantasy, the 'dream fantasy'. Here, one can see something like a dynamism of the category of fantasy: as soon as there is representation, there is fantasy. In the same vein, one could say that the dream is fantasy. Lacan will go further still, to the point of saying that dream is fantasy. This category betrays great dynamism and our use does not exploit its particular vitality, its particular conceptual vitality, which is quite evident here.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> Sharpe, E., 'Analysis of a Single Dream', Chapter V of *Dream Analysis*, London: Hogarth, 1937, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>19</sup> Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation, op. cit.*, pp. 197.

Observe that on pages 274-5 the last word on dream interpretation that Lacan puts forward bears on the dream of Elle Sharpe's patient. Elle Sharpe has very thoroughly analysed this dream, and Lacan over-interprets it. The Lacanian over-interpretation of this dream is a fantasy, and this section ends on a fantasy. (*to be continued...*)

Translated from the French by A. R. Price

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