

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE IN *THE LOGIC OF PHANTASY**

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Making sense of the Lacanian clinic

I hope that the title of this paper will have lowered any expectations that it will be a wide-ranging, comprehensive and contemporary consideration of the burning questions surrounding the multiple aspects of the debate on sexual difference.

The very circumscribed nature of what I have to say comes from a style of working on Jacques Lacan that we have been engaged in at St Vincent's Hospital in Dublin for the past twelve years.

Our main interest is a clinical one. There is good reason for this because in many ways we are still at the stage that Freud found Charcot when he observed his presentations at the Salpêtrière. Last Wednesday for example a man was presented at our weekly case conference who had developed a severe shake of the head after a relatively minor work accident some years ago. He had consulted neurologists in the United States, England and Scotland as well as in several Irish hospitals and had defeated their best endeavours. The only relief he obtained from this distressing condition was when his wife found and massaged a certain spot on his back but the success of even this procedure was, he admitted 'a little *erratic*'!

The only thing that threw light on his condition was Lacan's remark that *a hysteric is one who devotes his/her life to looking for a master that they can master*. The essential first step in dealing with this particular case was above all for the therapist to renounce from the outset any pretension to expertise and invite the patient to undertake an analysis.

* Based on a paper given at the RSI Roma Conference organised by Nomos and the European Foundation for Psychoanalysis, 14-16 May 1999.

Formulations like this, that stand out in clinical practice once they have been highlighted, sustain us in our wager that Lacan can help us to understand and treat the suffering people who address themselves to us. This goes hand in hand with the project of trying to make more of his work available to English speaking readers so that other clinicians may be able to enter into direct contact with the text - rather than with the now proliferating secondary sources - and test it against their experience. Hence a chronological, historical approach that begins each year with the drafting of an English translation of a seminar. This is worked through by the group, and based on that work we make available the final drafts that some of you know.

Now Lacan's slogan for many years was that of a return to Freud and it was reasonably easy for us to see the clinical applications of his re-reading and reviving of classical Freudian concepts. I will illustrate this a little later. But there is a curious point in the mid-sixties when he begins to speak in the seminars about a clinic that is no longer Freudian but Lacanian. There is little trace of this in the texts that are available to English speakers since, as you know, there is a gap between 1964 and 1972 in the seminars that have been translated and it is precisely in those years that the Lacanian clinic begins to take shape.

What I am going to talk about this morning is our struggle to clarify what that clinic involves and in particular our attempt to find the clinical relevance of the notion of sexual difference - better perhaps to say sexual distinction - in *The Logic of Phantasy*. This seminar is a further step in Lacan's persistent attempt to formalise psychoanalysis, to find a logical consistency between its major concepts and to show the links that exist between the theory and the practice. Logic is stressed to highlight a desire to remove the elements of intuition and arbitrariness and guesswork that make it such an object of suspicion to other disciplines and most particularly the philosophy of science, and to restore it to a pride of place among therapeutic practices.

The attempt to progress psychoanalysis by linking it to logic will undoubtedly end up in some blind alleys and mistakes but it is a stimulus to research that hopefully will lead to greater clarity in theory and

practice. In the English speaking world at least it has proved much more difficult to stimulate clinicians as opposed to philosophers or literary theorists to take this path. As a result the Lacanian clinic has been developed in university departments rather than in hospitals with a consequent dilution of the clinical dimension that pervades Lacan's work.

Approaching the *Logic of Phantasy*

One of the difficulties in presenting this year's work is that Lacan, in a sense, makes every effort to give us *nothing* to hold onto in order to confront us with what he calls 'the void central to Freud's discovery'. This discovery he describes at one point as a 'teaching full of sobriety' that resists all efforts to reduce it to an exploration of the history of his thinking or even his vocabulary - a remark directed at Paul Ricoeur's *On Interpretation* on the one hand and Laplanche and Pontalis' *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse* on the other.

But despite the labyrinthine and elliptical style that he favours to avoid debasing the doctrine there are occasional markers that provide a clear orientation for the direction that he believes psychoanalytic research should take ...

'Its centre', [he says], 'and it is a sign that I can only recall it with this force when properly speaking I am installing my discourse in what I can legitimately call a logic, that it is at this moment that I can recall that everything turns for us around what has to be called the *difficulty* - not of being as someone said in his old age - the difficulty *inherent in the sexual act*'.¹

This is a powerful, if somewhat turgid, statement of what our central concern should be but we should not allow ourselves to be intimidated by

¹ J. Lacan. *The Logic of Phantasy, Seminar XIV 1966-67*. Trans. C. Gallagher (unpublished), session XXII, p. 2.

it since it is also the central concern of many of our contemporaries. In a certain sense what Lacan is inviting us to concern ourselves with is only child's play.

The centre of the universe

Just after receiving a request for an abstract of this paper from the conference organisers I read a piece by Kathryn Holmquist in the *Irish Times* that began as follows:

'Last summer my naked one-year-old son and his two older sisters were playing in the paddling pool in the garden when suddenly my son looked down and observed himself with surprise. Watching him, my six-year old eldest declared: 'Look! He's found it: the centre of the universe.'

How, I asked myself in amazement, could she know that already? At six, she knew all she needed to know about the sex war: men rule the world. Now seven, she also knows what 'sexy' means, thanks to - among other things - the Spice Girls.'

In this short text, describing a modern day Garden of Eden, we already have a rich mine of observations. The little boy's surprised discovery of this appendage to his rapidly changing narcissistic image; his sister's awareness of his look and her own immediate awareness of a part of the male body that classical psychoanalysis would see as having become particularly valorised for her in the course of her own Oedipal struggles - after all what is it that distinguishes the body of her mother's sexual partner - and the mother's formulation of the status of males and females in what she sees as the ongoing war of the sexes in *Anno Domini* 1999.

The author goes on to bemoan the fact that today 'young women have rejected feminism in favour of being 'baby ladies' and are being encouraged to choose 'hips-tits-lips' power, non-threatening to the male

ego and stimulating to the male id', over against a now outmoded 'girl power'.

And she concludes: 'My fear is that little girls who grow up seeing images of women whose first desire above all is to be 'sexy', may always believe that the phallus is the centre of the universe'.²

The Golden Ratio

Now the Lacanian edifice has often been characterised as phallogentric. But it must be stressed that for him the phallus is not the emblem of a triumphant patriarchy. In the course of this seminar he frequently points out that sexual difference is only supported by something lacking on the side of the phallus.³ He introduces a new articulation to this notion of phallic lack with a remark made at a crucial moment of the seminar that we are considering this morning.

'There is somewhere' [he says] 'in a volume called my *Ecrits*' [the seminar is being held in the year following the publication of the *Ecrits*] 'an article called *The meaning of the phallus* where I write: the phallus as signifier gives the ratio of desire (in the sense that the term - I mean ratio - is used as the 'mean and extreme' ratio of harmonic division)'.⁴

We will have a chance to examine this remark later. For the moment let us simply note that the reference is to a paper that Lacan had given - in German - ten years previously, and that it bears witness to the fact that his efforts to formalise and put into mathematical proportion some of the basic terms of psychoanalysis does not begin with this seminar.

We will not be able to consider Lacan's use of the golden ratio as fully as it deserves. He spends no fewer than ten sessions of the seminar

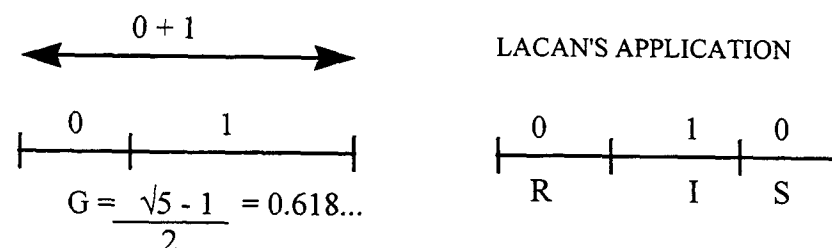
² *Irish Times*, April 24th, 1999.

³ J. Lacan, *op.cit.*, session VII, p. 14.

⁴ *ibid*, session XII, p. 9.

in developing his thesis that it can be a useful way for understanding the sexual act and the nature of the relationship between the sexes. Later we will have the notorious phrase 'Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel'. Here his position appears to be that even though this relationship is not one of complementarity it can aspire to a certain measure and harmony and to a mitigation of what Charles Melman has called the barbarity that is the rule of man-woman relationships in our culture.

Expressed in the simplest way the golden ratio refers to a way of dividing a line so that the ratio of the larger part to the smaller is equal to the ratio of the whole to the larger.



If this appears to be completely uninteresting, its importance may be hinted at by pointing out that this ratio has been considered, from ancient times, to produce forms of special beauty. The rectangular face of the front of the Parthenon has sides whose ratio is in this proportion and it is also found in nature where the shell of the Nautilus mollusc, for example, spirals out in a fashion dependent on the golden ratio. It is also related to a pattern that may be observed in many situations involving growth, from the growth of plants to the growth of a computer database.

One way of approaching Lacan's long development of this obscure mathematical metaphor is perhaps to say that his contention is that *we are measuring our sexual life on the wrong scale* and that this constitutes a barrier to sexual satisfaction. Instead of taking as our norm the imagined bliss of a perfect union - an imaginary 1 - we should take into consideration both the real 0 and the symbolic O.

There is always an element of repetition in the human sexual act, a residue that is carried forward from the Oedipal conflicts that mark the

subjectivity of each individual. This residue is concretised in the o-object and it is what ensures that there can never be a simple complementarity between the partners in a couple. But the fact that two elements are incommensurable with one another need not exclude measure and harmony, says the golden ratio. In the case of the human couple the essential prerequisite for this harmony is the acceptance of castration and the renunciation of an imagined perfection as the goal of the sexual act.

Relating the possibility of sexual satisfaction to 0.618 is not without risk. 'Next time I make love', a listener is reported to have said, 'I had better bring along my slide-rule'. A remark that Lacan finds only mildly amusing in that the individual in question fails to appreciate the serious intersubjective issues that are at stake in circumscribing the notion of a residue.

Although there are some references to the golden ratio and the related Fibonacci numbers in later seminars this again seems to be an example of Lacan taking a metaphor as far as he can and leaving the threads to be picked up by his successors.

Sexual identity and difference in the early Lacan

Sexual difference might seem to be a mainly political or cultural issue brought into prominence by the work of feminists. But in our experience it is a crucial clinical issue in every case that presents itself to us and the inquiry into and the discussion around the issue of the sexual identity of the patient is usually the key contribution of the psychoanalysts to the weekly case conference.

If one were to ask any of these patients 'are you a man or a woman?' the question would appear trivial and facetious except in the most unusual cases. But for the analyst - at least the Freudian or Lacanian analyst - the answer that is being sought is at the level of the unconscious and surprisingly, paradoxically, at the level of the unconscious the subject does not affirm itself as having a male or female identity.

In Freud and in the early Lacan we are not born male or female - this is the dispute with Jones and Klein - but become sexed subjects by

passing through the existential crisis of the Oedipus complex. In other words children must renounce their natural sexual desire for the mother and through the intermediary of the image or name of the father internalise an ideal of maleness or femaleness. This will enable them at the appropriate time to assume the role and functions of the sexually mature man or woman.

The classical theory, very briefly put, is based on the assumption that we are dealing with the conjugal family based on a stable relationship between a male-female couple. The assumption of sexual identity presumes a particular psychological relation between the parents and the anomalies in this relation serve to account for a whole range of pathological conditions. It is here also, as sequelae of the Oedipus complex, that the *o-objects* come in as the real causes of desire that cannot be assimilated into the signifiers that have come to represent the subject.

Whether you are dealing with a suicidal young gay man or a depressed elderly grandmother you will always find at the core of their pathology traces of a radically inadequate assumption of sexual identity. The particularities of this - because the subjective history is always a singular one - can be a guide both to diagnosis and therapy.

You can find a brilliant and comprehensive presentation of this approach in Lacan's 1930's essay on *The Family* and it has served us well for many years as a theoretical framework for understanding the clinic. But Lacan was well aware as he wrote it of the threats to the conjugal family arising mainly from the decline of the role of the father and the debasement of his imago. This led to what he described at that time as the great neurosis of our time based on an insufficient repression of the desire for the mother and a bastardisation of the paternal ideal. Things have gone much further today.

Now many Lacanians find this a hopelessly outmoded way of approaching the clinic because they for the most part began to move into the new Lacanian clinic almost 30 years ago. But I assure you even this classical approach is way ahead of what is being done, at least from an analytic point of view, in most hospital situations in the English speaking world. We have managed to convince a certain number of our psychiatric

and psychological colleagues, who are for the most part solidly anchored in biology and DSM-IV, of its validity. What we are now trying to do is to move forward in a way that is both comprehensible and convincing for us and for them.

The new ideas on sexual identity and sexual difference are crucial for this. These were first put forward by Lacan and others in the 1960's and have made their way into the thinking and behaviour of the general public much more recently. Perhaps the logic that Lacan is pushing to the forefront in this seminar will help us to present them in a way that is rigorous and clinically relevant.

The place of logic in phantasy...

As his teaching develops - *The Logic of Phantasy* is the fourteenth year of his seminar - Lacan takes more and more the path of logic. Not simply in the sense of logical consistency, that what you say should hang together, but in the sense of the quite specific discipline that received its first formal underpinnings in Aristotle and has developed throughout the centuries to culminate in the intricacies of contemporary mathematical logic. This reached its high point in the work of Frege and his successors.

What is most characteristic of the logic that interests Lacan are the forms of writing in which it is expressed. These began with Aristotle's use of the letters of the alphabet, X is Y or X is not Y and culminated in the artificial symbolic languages of Boole, Peirce and others. The publication in 1879 of Frege's *Begriffsschrift*, his idiosyncratic and original notation of conceptual writing marks, according to the Kneales, in the history frequently referred to by Lacan,⁵ is the most important date in the history of logic and one of the greatest intellectual inventions of the nineteenth century.

The unconscious writes. It reaches its conclusions like modern logic without thinking. Copi and Cohen quote Alfred North Whitehead, one of the major contributors to the advance of symbolic logic to the effect that

⁵ W. Kneale and M. Kneale. *The Development of Logic*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962.

... by the aid of symbolism, we can make transitions in reasoning almost mechanically by the eye, which otherwise would call into play the higher faculties of the brain.⁶

And they go on to note that ...

From this point of view, paradoxically enough, logic is not concerned with developing our powers of thought but with developing techniques that permit us to accomplish some tasks without have to think so much.⁷

From very early on Freud had introduced the language of logic into psychoanalysis, most clearly perhaps in his chapter on 'The means of representation' in the *Interpretation of Dreams*. The means referred to are the devices that the dream-work makes use of to represent logical connections between the elements that appear in the dream. The different portions of the complicated structure of the dream-thoughts, he writes:

'... stand, of course in the most manifold logical relations to one another. They can represent foreground and background, digressions and illustrations, conditions, chains of evidence and counter-arguments ... What representations do dreams provide for 'if', 'because', 'just as', 'although', 'either-or', and all the other conjunctions without which we cannot understand either sentences or speeches?'.⁸

This carries over into the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* where subtle logical connections link the

⁶ A.N. Whitehead. *An Introduction to Mathematics*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1911.

⁷ I.M. Copi and C. Cohen. *Introduction to Logic*. 8th Edition. New York, Macmillan, 1990. p. 254.

⁸ S. Freud (1900). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. S.E., IV. p. 312.

unconsciousness associative paths that determine apparently irrational thinking and behaviour. In the joke book in particular faulty reasoning, disguised by a logical façade, is given a major role in the analysis of how jokes produce their witty effect. To take the shortest example I know: 'Either it's raining or it's not raining, but it's not raining, therefore it's raining'.

In advancing into the domain of logic Lacan, therefore, is once more returning to Freud. But just as in linguistics he makes far more explicit reference to the discipline itself and to the writings of its modern exponents.

... and of phantasy in logic

Freud's early efforts and Lacan's later developments run counter to the conviction of professional logicians that the language of dreams is not a suitable object for the application of logical analysis. From the very beginning, as the Kneales recall on the first page of their book, certain types of discourse were excluded from logic:

'Since logic is not simply valid argument' [which is what Freud was concerned with] 'but the reflection upon principles of validity, it will arise naturally only when there is already a considerable body of inferential or argumentative material to hand. Not every type of discourse provokes logical inquiry. Pure story-telling or literary discourse, for example, does not provide a sufficient amount of argumentative material'.⁹

And in the same vein a standard introduction to logic asserts:

... not all thought is an object of study for the logician ... There are many mental processes or kinds of thought that

⁹ M. Kneale and W. Kneale, op.cit., p. 1.

are different from reasoning. One may remember something, or imagine it, or regret it ... Or one may let one's thoughts 'drift along' in a daydream or reverie, following what psychologists call free association, in which one image is replaced by another in an order that is not logical ... There seem to be some laws governing reverie, but they are not studied by logicians.¹⁰

Thus they specifically exclude the types of thinking that psychoanalysis takes as its object. When Freud wrote to Fliess that he did not intend to do any more proofing of *The Interpretation of Dreams* 'even if it contains 2467 mistakes', his choice of number would not in this instance be subject to inquiry by logicians. But the whole basis of his discipline is to show that this number picked out of thin air is in fact anything but random and that the laws governing its production can be formulated.

Lacan's programme is to refine Freud's use of logic by introducing logical symbolism in a much more explicit way. To read Lacan from this point on you have to be familiar with the symbols for conjunction, negation and disjunction, for implication and equivalence, for universal, particular, and existential quantification and so on. In fact analysts are advised to go to school to the logicians in order to be able to give a rigorous formulation to their discipline. They have been only too happy to generalise Freud's thesis that the unconscious knows no contradiction, in order to exempt it from the requirements that bind the discourse of other sciences.

But he also issues a challenge to the logicians. Their aporia comes from the elimination of the subject and from ignoring the dimension of desire that underpins their work. The logic the psychoanalyst finds in phantasy puts in question the whole foundation of logic since it implies that the type of discourse from which the subject is inseparable should also be an object of logical inquiry, creating a new type of sub-logic:

¹⁰ I.M. Copi and C. Cohen, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

If there is a logic of phantasy, it is because it is more fundamental (*princielle*) than any logic that flows into the formalising defiles where it has revealed itself, as I have said, to be so fruitful in the modern epoch.¹¹

Logic cannot limit itself to the assertive material defined by the authors quoted above:

The sentences that I called imperative, implorative ... solicit something ... that cannot but interest logic.¹²

And these commands and demands form the texture of the discourse of the psychoanalyst and that implicitly or explicitly call on the psychoanalyst to act.

The aim then is to set up a logic that is informed by phantasy, the phantasy that has been excluded from logical inquiry by logicians.

Phantasy as axiom

The notion of conducting analysis on the principles of logic, focusing on the restoration of lost axioms and connections, is antipathetic to many people who pride themselves on their empathy and intuition not to mention their knowledge and their common sense. Lacan's approach is that such a logical investigation is required both in the case of the individual patients and particular schools of thought because psychoanalysis is fundamentally a search for truth.

The logicians share this search and the *truth tables* introduced by Boole are only the most graphic illustration of the clarity they have tried to introduce into it. Giving psychoanalysis a logical foundation is more important than providing experimental proof of its effectiveness -

¹¹ J. Lacan, *op.cit.*, session II, p. 6.

¹² *ibid*, session XXIV, p. 2.

especially when that process of verification involves an abandonment of the primary principles of the discipline.

It is objected that this search for axioms and for logical connections will lead to a sterile analysis of a cognitive-behavioural type from which all humanity and affectivity are banished. To show how far this is from the truth let me give you a brief example recently heard from a depressed but very intelligent woman who after a particularly painful day in which the reassurances of her family had not been able to lift her mood said to me: 'It's as if everything that I think and feel about myself comes from the phrase 'Nobody wants me''.

This was not the first time she had said this but on this occasion, with this meeting in mind, I said 'Yes, but what does that proposition derive from. It sounds as if 'nobody wants me' is a reply to an offer that you have already made.' Without going into too many details let it suffice to say that she had first heard the phrase from her mother many years ago when she was seriously ill. Her own fleeting, spontaneous reaction had been to think 'well, I certainly don't want you and wouldn't it be better for everyone if you were to die'. A feeling of guilt at her own ruthlessness immediately followed this.

I will go no further into this because the only point I am making is that I would not necessarily have paid any particular attention to the initial phrase if I had not been suspected that it was being taken as an axiom and that its status as an unquestioned truth could perhaps be challenged by investigating the logical connections that supported it.

In this seminar Lacan sees a major task of the psychoanalyst as being the search for axioms - major premises, truths thought to be self-evident - from which deductions are made and reasoning proceeds often with disastrous consequences. *Cherchez l'axiom!*

In interpretation, Lacan points out, the phantasy plays the role of axiom. It is not simply the imaginary. Lacan had previously described it as a scenario, something that has a story line rather than being simply an image. Here he takes things further by defining it as a sentence - more than the rest of the unconscious, phantasy is structured like a language. And furthermore it is not simply a spoken sentence but a written one.

Which is why I like to distinguish between *phantasy* and *fantasy* reserving the former for the structure articulated in this sentence form.

The other characteristics that he attributes to it is that it is closed, in the sense of having a particular signifying organisation and that a particular phantasy is not limited to a particular pathology. In saying this he is taking his cue from Freud's finding that the paradigmatic phantasy, 'a child is being beaten', is found in hysterical, obsessional and even neurasthenic patients.

Sade's phantasy might be said to be the axiom that God is supremely wicked and Sacher Masoch's that the only way to capture enjoyment is to steal it from a woman. The essential thing is that the subject takes up his place in a signifying arrangement and it from this that his thinking and behaviour are derived.

The phantasy is obviously subject to transformations. 'A child is being beaten', has emerged from 'my father is beating the sibling whom I hate' and 'my father is beating me as a sign of his love'. But what is important is that the phantasy can be reduced to an axiomatic form, which has the status of a major premise from which unconscious thinking produces its deductions.

A further illustration of what Lacan is aiming at in practice - and this may help to clarify the sense of a Lacanian clinic - is his critique of Edmund Bergler's *The Basic Neurosis*. In fact, Lacan claims, Bergler has not got to the basic axiom governing his patients' thinking with the result that he takes up a punitive and judgmental attitude towards people that he sees as fundamentally indulging in self-pity, injustice collectors. Your role as an analyst is not to judge or to give advice on how people should lead their lives but to help the subject articulate the fundamental phantasy through which reality is mediated for him. What do you know, asks Lacan, whether it would be a good or bad thing for this particular individual to marry or divorce, etc. You are not there as an educator but as an analyst.¹³

¹³ cf P Stewart, 'Bergler's Basic Neurosis' in *The Letter*, Spring 1999. pp. 71-83.

Sexual difference and the sexual act

Nowhere perhaps does phantasy play the role of unexamined axiom more frequently and more perniciously than in the field of the relationship between the sexes. Lacan sets out to correct what he considers to be deviations supported by psychoanalytic theorising with a renewed attempt to articulate what is involved in sexual identity, sexual difference and the sexual act.

His fundamental thesis in this seminar is at one level simply a restatement of the classical position on the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. The sexual act can only be realised by the male when he has gone through the process of castration and sublimation and any sexual activity that takes place in the absence of this is not a sexual act and is to be seen as perverse.

However, a major change in perspective has occurred in how castration is to be understood. Initially seen as an awareness of lack, or the possibility of lack, in one's own body, castration soon began to be seen as relating principally to an awareness of lack in the mother. But in these years Lacan has moved the question on by seeing castration as the fundamental incapacity of language to deal with sex. This shifts the emphasis away from the different approach of the male or female to castration and puts the focus on their common incapacity to find a signifying formulation for male and female.

Traditionally the primary way in which such a distinction was affirmed was in the sexual act, in which the male asserted his masculinity by his capacity to have an erection, penetrate and ejaculate. The female's part in the act has always been surrounded by a greater mystery but the ability to perform what Helene Deutsch calls somewhere 'womanly functions' was considered indispensable. In the larger scheme of things these included an acceptance of menstruation and a capacity to become pregnant and to carry a child to term. As regards the sexual act proper the capacity to have intercourse appears to have been the main requirement.

This version of the sexual act as affirming the male/female difference Lacan describes as frivolous. The primacy of the sexual act he states should be:

... articulated by the separation of two formulae. First: there is no sexual act, to be understood as: which is weighty enough to affirm in the subject the certainty that it is of a particular sex. Second: there is only the sexual act, implying: which gives thinking a way of defending itself since the subject is split in it: cf the structure of the phantasy above.¹⁴

This dense and elliptical formulation summarises much of what Lacan speaks about in the second half of this year's seminar. Clearly it would require a commentary that goes far beyond the limits of this paper. But in order to give some flavour of his approach and to encourage the line by line confrontation with the text that our group found always evocative and sometimes even informative I will attempt to bring out some of the key elements.

What is meant by such a strange formulation of what can be described as a sexual act? It is based on a distinction between acting and doing. First of all it affirms that an act is an act of the subject. The sexual act is not simply biological copulation but involves a dimension of unconscious desire and a repetition of the Oedipal situation. The adult participants in the sexual act know that they are the products of sexual desire.

'The centre of psychoanalytic research is the difficulty inherent in the sexual act'.¹⁵ The myth of an axiomatic complementarity based on a partial reading of the Genesis story, 'Man and woman he created them', is at the source of many disillusion. It ignores the corrective intended by the parallel story of the creation of woman from the body of man. What the

¹⁴ C Gallagher. 'Jacques Lacan's Summary of the Seminar of 1966-67' in *The Letter*, Spring 1999. pp. 93-94.

¹⁵ J. Lacan, op.cit., session XX, p. 2.

man recognises in the woman is something that has been fashioned from his 'rib'.

To see the woman as a phallic complement is simply to indulge in a narcissistic phantasy. To accept castration is to accept that there is no phallic object and no sexual complementarity between men and women. But this does not rule out what is possible - a measure and a harmony between the sexes. This needs to be taught in order to deprive the current myths of a scientific justification. It should be part of the knowledge that intelligent journalists have at their disposal rather than seeing measure and harmony as a betrayal of the sisterhood in the barbaric war of the sexes.

The awareness of the difficulty inherent in the sexual act is similar to the recognition of the difficulty of social harmony. When it was recognised, by Marx, a forward step was taken. No progress can be made in the harmony of the sexes so long as this inherent difficulty is not recognised. To gloss over the difficulty by an imaginary or ideological idealisation of the union between the sexes is to perpetuate the misery and the unhappiness of family life.

In the 1930's Lacan was already questioning the apotheosis of conjugal life, the life of the married couple, to which the paternalistic family had evolved since the foundation of the bourgeoisie and the installation of marriage as the primary form of human relations. More recently, in the last 20 years or so as Charles Melman has observed, young people in particular appear to have come to doubt the primacy of the sexual act, taken as axiomatic by their forebears, in the hierarchy of human values.

Lacan argues that 'there is no sexual act, to be understood as: weighty enough to affirm the subject in the certainty that it is of a particular sex.' What is with rare exceptions taken as a given by the register of births and marriages is now much less certain in the intimate relations of the couple and still more in the private thoughts of the individual. But curiously and paradoxically it is only the sexual act that provides the subject with some defence against the sense of splitting inherent in it.

We are not talking here about the biological bisexuality that Freud borrowed from Fliess. The point is the incommensurability of the *o-object* to the supposed unit implied in the physical conjunction of beings of opposite sex. And this *o-object* is intrinsic to the phantasy, which is the only way by which the subject can pass into the real.

With regard to sexual difference the main conclusion is that certain axiomatic positions do not hold up. The sexed subject cannot find a footing in language. There is no foundation in the word, no signifier for what male or female is. Freud approached it only by the metaphors of activity and passivity, of seeing and being seen, in other words along the path of the partial drives. There is no genital drive on the prowl, no Eros that draws males and females together into one. There is no essence of male or female, no *animus* and *anima*, and the distinction between them can only turn around the presence or absence of the phallus.

The sexual act does not simply concern the couple and it is not the case that each partner can make the other feel assured of being a man or woman. There is always a reference to the parental couple because unconscious desire, which is necessary for an act, implies the repetition of the activation of the unconscious desire for the mother or father who are the primary Oedipal objects. In the Lacanian world what activates desire is the *o-object* and it is as *o-object* that the parental couple play their role in the phantasy.

Conclusion

This paper has left to one side many of the important themes developed in this difficult seminar. One questioner in the audience was particularly unhappy that I had omitted any reference to Descartes and Lacan's critique of his *cogito*.

'I think, therefore I am'. Does that mean that my consciousness of being a man or a woman is enough to ground the assertion 'I am a man' or 'I am a woman'? This has echoes of the dream of the Volksgarten restaurant in which the dreamer's recognition of the sexual quality of his partner Fraulein K as a woman is suddenly clouded by a dark passage

that calls into question what appeared to be the lovely certainties of a man-woman relationship.¹⁶

To meet the requirements of psychoanalysis Lacan transforms Descartes' formula into 'Either I do not think or I am not' thus emphasising the fact that one is never surer of one's being than when one is not thinking about it. This new formula, obtained by a de Morgan transformation of the original, refers back to Lacan's propositions on alienation in Seminar XI. In 'your money or your life' you lose either your money or your life. In the transformation of the *cogito* you lose either your conscious thinking or your being.

If you want to be - a man or a woman - it may be that it is only when you have got to the stage of no longer asking yourself the question that you can enter into the tranquil possession of what you are.

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¹⁶ *ibid*, session VIII, p. 10; S. Freud, *op.cit.*, p. 333.

METALANGUAGE, FORMAL STRUCTURES, AND THE DISSOLUTION OF TRANSFERENCE*

Jason Glynos

Introduction

This essay attempts precise the meaning and significance of Lacan's claim that 'there is no metalanguage', and to link this to issues of mathematical formalisation and the end of analysis. My investigation will be conducted against the implicit background of another of his well-known claims: 'the unconscious is structured like a language.' I will approach this task, however, from the opposite direction. The question then becomes: In what sense can we say that Lacan thinks that there is a metalanguage? In answering this question I will present some evidence in support of the (hypo)thesis that Lacan *does* hold onto a conception of metalanguage - a quasi-transcendental conception - but that this is, paradigmatically, mathematics *qua* non-glottic writing. This line of inquiry generates at least two insights which I will highlight in the final part of the essay. First, I argue that it suggests a productive way of reading the upper left hand side of the graph of desire, as found in his text *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious*.¹ More specifically, I argue that we can conceive the relation signifier<?>jouissance in terms of a notion that can be called *formalised delimitation*, a process of *formalisation-to-the-limits*. Secondly, and finally, I

* This essay is an extended version of a paper published in (1999) 2 *Psychoanalytical Notebooks* under the title *Formalising-to-the-Limits and the End of Analysis*. It was produced in the context of work done in the Cartel on the Graph of Desire. I thank fellow members Roger Litten, Jo Sessions, and Howard Britten, and our plus-one Vincent Dachy for their comments.

¹ J. Lacan. *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious*. (1960) *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. A. Sheridan. New York, W.W. Norton, 1977. p. 292.