

BEING, KNOWING AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE*

Cormac Gallagher

*What must be known are the conditions required
in order that someone may be able to say of himself:
I am a psychoanalyst.*

Jacques Lacan

Introduction

Sandwiched, bulky but almost invisible, between *The Four Fundamental Concepts* and *Science and Truth*, the 1964-1965 *Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis*** is one of Jacques Lacan's least known seminars. For students of Lacan this is a serious loss in the first place because it leaves them in the dark about his teaching in the year following the foundation of the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris* in June 1964, the point at which he had assumed his definitive exclusion from the International Psychoanalytic Association and had set about the creation of his own school. It also marks more clearly than before a certain distancing from, a going beyond of Freud. The previous eleven seminars had all featured long and detailed commentaries on Freudian texts but here this dimension is almost entirely missing. Towards the end of the year - inspired possibly by Michel Foucault's recently published *Birth of the clinic* - there is a proposal to establish a new framework for psychoanalytic clinical practice which will be not so much Freudian as Lacanian:

* Presented at the third annual congress of APPI (Dublin, 23 November, 1996), taking *Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis* as its theme.

* All references to this text in the present article refer to Cormac Gallagher's translation (unpublished) of J. Lacan's *Seminar XII (1964-65) Les Problemes Cruciaux de la Psychoanalyse*. The dates given refer to the week's lecture and are followed by the page number of the text for that week.

What is involved is nothing less than to start on this psychoanalytic clinic which has been spoken about for a long time, to see what status can be given it starting from the functions of my teaching.¹

Finally, this seminar introduces some of the young Turks who, despite being challenged in this seminar by some of Lacan's older followers, will eventually win a place for themselves as his chosen successors - and impose the policy of censorship which is, incidentally, responsible for the ignorance surrounding this as well as a number of his other works.

But it is not simply the obscurantism of Lacan's official heirs which makes this seminar so inaccessible. Neither edited nor published in French, it is available only in a typescript which has many gaps and in particular gives an incomplete version of the drawings of the topological surfaces to which Lacan continually refers. The obscure contortions involved in the construction and cutting of the Klein Bottle, the highlighting of Frege's Foundations of arithmetic as essential for grasping the Freudian notion of the subject, the subtle grammatical analysis designed to elucidate the link between being and numeration in Plato's later dialogues and an enigmatic discussion of the sexual identity of Lol V Stein, are further obstacles to understanding, especially for the practitioner who is reading Lacan primarily with a view to assimilating something of his clinical genius.

In one of the final sessions of the year Lacan refers to a lecture given by Plato on the good, at which Aristotle took notes which were later relayed to posterity by his disciple, Simplicius:

What surprised those who attended this lecture was that in it Plato spoke only about number. Everyone was expecting a discussion about what was involved in the good, whether it was riches, or good health, or good humour, or good knowledge. A part of the audience even left in the middle, very disappointed.²

¹J. Lacan. *Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis* 28 April 65, 14.

² *ibid*, 9 June 1965, 3.

Readers of this seminar might easily find themselves in the same position as Plato's listeners when confronted with mathematical and logical abstractions which seem to relate only very distantly to what they may consider to be crucial problems for psychoanalysis. And this is probably truer today, when psychoanalysis finds itself under constant attack, than it was in the halcyon days of the mid-sixties.

However, despite these difficulties, a careful reading of this text shows its immediate relevance to the contemporary problems confronting analysis and analysts. The essential question for Lacan is how to ground the very legitimacy of the analytic operation, not simply on the basis of its greater or lesser therapeutic effectiveness, but in terms of an articulation of the fundamental logic which underpins the position and function of the psychoanalyst.

For it is not enough that you should be, according to the classical formula, perfectly clear about your relationships with your patients, it is also necessary for you to be able to tolerate your relations with psychoanalysis itself.³

The demonstration of this legitimacy he undertakes by showing that the Freudian discovery of the unconscious is not only situated along a line of investigation of the human subject which can be traced back to the origins of Western thought, but also that it also converges in a remarkable fashion with the most serious contemporary thinking on the identity of the human subject. Just as in earlier writings he would claim that Freud anticipated many of de Saussure's propositions on the primacy of the signifier over the signified, so here he claims a certain priority for Freud in formulating the status of the subject of the unconscious in a way that is in substantial agreement with the arguments of Gottlob Frege, the founder of mathematical logic, in establishing the necessity for the concept of zero to define the notion of the one.

³ *ibid*, 16 June 65, 1.

The purpose of this paper is to facilitate an approach to this seminar, not so much by giving a step-by-step *resume* of it but rather by isolating some of the notions that I have found modified both my thinking and my practice as I tried to come to terms with what are often some very unsettling propositions. I will also try to quote those formulations which while not always comprehensible seem to me to best evoke the new direction that Lacan's thought is taking at this crucial time.

The poverty of contemporary psychoanalysis

It should be noted that in striving to legitimate the analytic operation Lacan is accepting the fact that many of the criticisms directed against psychoanalysis as a theory and as a therapeutic procedure are justified in some measure and that psychoanalysts are often quite unable to articulate a rationale for their action. He is particularly critical of the style of analysis that has dominated the English speaking world since the death of Freud. In fact, the theme of sense versus meaning which is a major one in the current seminar is a polemic against the search for meaning that many contemporary analysts take to be the core of the psychoanalytic method - finding a meaning for the current symptom in the traumata of the past. For Lacan this is part of the lamentable assimilation of psychoanalysis into psychology which he regards as leading to the abandonment of its own principles and the poor repute into which it has fallen among theoreticians and therapists alike.

Let me illustrate: A psychiatric registrar is presenting the case history of a patient who is going to be interviewed at the weekly case conference by a visiting psychoanalytic dignitary. He begins: 'This is the case of a thirty eight year old single woman ...' He is immediately interrupted by the visitor: 'OK! Stop right there. What do we know about this woman?'

There follows a disquisition backed up by statistical surveys and clinical anecdotes about women as they come towards the end of their child-bearing years and the sense of the running down of the biological time-clock which will be sure to explain the symptomatology of this woman whether she has been diagnosed neurotic, phobic or even psychotic. And all of this in the name of a psychoanalytic understanding

of the way in which human beings relate to themselves and to their history.

This application of theoretical generalities to a particular case is an extreme example of ignoring the singularity of a subject's symptoms. But there is nothing unusual or still less caricatural about this description of the current style of applying psychoanalysis to a clinical situation. For the majority of clinicians today it would be seen as an enlightened and helpful way to deal with the pressing problems with which they are confronted. We will have reason to return to this anecdote because it illustrates in a quasi-paradigmatic way what Lacan claims, very much in opposition to the thinking of his contemporaries, and ours, to be at the root of the crucial problems that he deals with in this seminar - a medico/ psychological entification of the human subject which accentuates rather than alleviating the alienation at the origin of the illness. Contrast it with his own stand:

[T]o be a psychoanalyst is a responsible position, the most responsible of all, because he is the one to whom there is entrusted the operation of a radical ethical conversion, the one that introduces the subject to the order of desire', and that this involves nothing less than tracing out, always in a way related to the singularity of the subject, the complex path of the return of desire to its signifying origin.⁴

'A new class of people'

It may well have been the resistance of his medical colleagues to his way of conceptualising psychoanalysis that led Lacan - after initially bemoaning his exclusion from the IPA and the prestigious psychiatric hospital where he had conducted his seminars for a largely medical group of psychoanalytic trainees - to welcome an opportunity to direct his teaching to 'a new class of people' whose studies in philosophy and letters at the renowned *Ecole Normale Supérieure* led them to approach the

⁴ *ibid*, 5 May 65, 1&8.

status of the subject, unfettered by medical and psychological preconceptions. There are a number of unflattering references to 'a medical lack of reflectiveness' and to the deafness of therapeutically oriented doctors to the importance of philosophical questions for analysis and even though the psychiatrically trained psychoanalysts - Leclaire, Oury, Stein and others - are far from absent, there is a certain sense that Lacan, after his traumatic abandonment by his former colleagues, is beginning to favour this 'new stratum always ready to go into battle when perhaps older people take things more slowly'.⁵

The new class, many in their early twenties, were not slow to respond to his attentions and the young Jacques-Alain Miller's gleeful image of himself as the kitchen-boy who makes off with the cooking-pot from which the analysts draw their sustenance is an indication of their self-confidence and ambition. So, even though Lacan is still directing his remarks primarily to psychoanalytic practitioners, he also makes it clear that he is appealing not simply to health professionals but to all of those who are serious about their action and above all serious about the human subject.

What subject is the object of the psychoanalytic operation?

An articulated notion of this subject is the primary requirement for the legitimate practice of psychoanalysis and for its establishment as a logically coherent discipline. To put it another way, it is the responsibility of analysts to establish for themselves and communicate to those in other fields what the ontology of the subject is from the moment that there is an unconscious. To the argument that this is the domain of metaphysics rather than psychoanalysis Lacan had for many years retorted that even the most commonsense people might be surprised to find that their unreflected notion of the 'person' with whom they were dealing and on whom they hoped to exercise a radical transformation was little different to the Platonic notion of the soul. The implicit assumption, for example, that people seek their own good and that the task of the psychoanalyst is to

⁵ *ibid*, 23 June 65, 1.

help them in that search, is a form of naive metaphysics that is no less dangerous for being unarticulated. For Lacan it forms part of the ambiguous and bastard approach of the human sciences - personified by Jean Piaget - which is rightly criticised by those outside analysis because it naively takes 'man' as a given and goes about its work against the background of a whole set of unexamined preconceptions.

Lacan's stress on the subject was originally a pragmatic one which served as a barrier to the too easy assumption that the goal of psychoanalytic psychotherapy was the strengthening of a rational self-conscious ego. This assumption tended towards a masking in theory and in practice of the radical change of perspective on human affairs brought about by the discovery of the unconscious and reduced psychoanalysis to a type of cognitive psychology *a la* Janet - Pierre Janet who, Lacan quips somewhere, could never understand why he wasn't Freud. Lacan's sustained attack on what he sees as a dangerous illusion began with his exposure of the ego as an imaginary construct is given a new twist in the present seminar.

Already in the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* he had highlighted the subject of Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* as a precursor and essential precondition for the formulation of the Freudian subject of the unconscious. Descartes called into question all the representations of the world that thinking could construct but nevertheless found a certainty about his existence in the indubitable fact of the activity of thinking itself. Freud's subject of the unconscious also resists any attempt at representation. It is not a *Vorstellung*, Lacan reiterates in this seminar but a *Vorstellungsrepresentanz* - something that is a delegate for, a representative of a representation.

Lacan's attempt to produce this articulated notion of the subject in order to provide a cornerstone for the psychoanalytic operation is a subtle and complex one but it has immediate practical implications. One source of the analyst's certainty about the legitimacy of his action is the way in which this subject of the unconscious manifests itself in the forgetting of a proper name - the Signorelli example, Lacan reminds us, is the first of Freud's properly psychoanalytic writings. But the subject that appears here is not something that can be conceptualised in terms of a biological

substratum or a sequence of developmental stages. It appears in a temporal pulsation that reveals to us a different scene of action to that of our rational self-consciousness.⁶

Demand and frustration in contemporary psychoanalysis

Although this subject, as opposed to the *ego*, manifests itself in the most concrete possible manner in the experience of the psychoanalyst, it is largely ignored by English speaking analysts - if not in practice at least in their attempts to give a theoretical rationale for their work. By way of illustrating this, Lacan discusses a unpublished case by a brilliant young English analyst whom he simply refers to as Pearl. Not much detective work is needed to uncover the fact that the person in question is Miss Pearl King, already a prominent figure in the IPA and later to be President of the British Psychoanalytic Association.

Lacan's critique of this case would deserve a separate paper but the essential focus is on the way in which Miss King, in line with the prevailing fashion, treats the transference of the patient onto her as a reproduction of the unhappy relationships he had had with an abusive father. This stress on the past as a way of explaining the present is based on a psychoanalytic theory of developmental stages, but, for Lacan, it is a deviation in that it puts the emphasis in the treatment on the demanding ego in its relationships with parents, siblings and others, rather than on the desiring subject which is mobilised not so much by objects of need as by objects which cannot be given any representation - what Lacan calls the *o objects*. This is what he credits Miss King with realising when she suddenly sees - after many years of treatment - that whatever the real behaviour of the father may have been, it was the patient's 'great need for the myth of an unsatisfactory father' that sustained the vision of the past to which he clung as the origin of his illness.

By going along for so long with the patient's version of events - a version which seemed to be verified by Pearl King's own counter-transference reactions - Lacan argues that the analyst sustained him in a

⁶ C. Gallagher. *Lacan's Summary of Seminar XI*, in *The Letter*, No 5, Autumn 1995.

position of false identification that impeded access to his own desire which was organised precisely around this individual myth. To refer a present demand, as it appears in the transference, back to a primitive frustration of demand, usually attributed to various parental inadequacies in childhood, is to alienate the subject in the Other. This is all too easy for the analyst to do, in that the patient is only too willing to put her in the position of the original big Other, but the result is the adoption by the patient of a transference identity from which it may well be impossible to emerge, as exemplified by the interminable nature of the case under consideration.

It is often claimed that Lacan silences the analyst and, indeed, if he or she is deprived of recourse to general theory in order to explain the particular, or to the past in order to explain the present, the repertoire of possible interpretation strategies seems to be severely limited. This silence is, in the first instance, a withdrawal from any position that might encourage the subject to believe that the analyst can answer his demands - be the good O that was absent from his early history. But silence also has its positive aspect in that it favours the emergence of the subject of the unconscious, especially by focusing on the gaps or distortions of discourse which bear witness to the inchoate separation of the subject from his alienation in the Other, and which demonstrate irrefutably to him that there is in him something more than him - an 'it' which speaks. Hence the emphasis in this seminar on the search for sense - which refers to the subject of the unconscious - rather than meaning - which is a production of the conscious ego.

Sense **and** meaning

At the end of the first lecture of the year which is devoted to Naom Chomsky's grammatical but supposedly meaningless sentence, 'Colourless green ideas sleep furiously', Lacan encourages his listeners to consult the Alice books in order to grasp the crucial distinction between sense and meaning. Let us consider then, by way of illustration, the first stanza of the poem that Alice finds in her looking-glass world and her reaction to it:

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Few dispute that Jabberwocky is the greatest nonsense poem in the English language and it is interpreted for Alice by various characters she encounters - including Humpty Dumpty - a little in the way a contemporary analyst might interpret it by translating it as if it were a code that could be given a meaning in another language: '*Brillig* means four o'clock in the afternoon - the time when you begin broiling things for dinner.' But Alice's own spontaneous reaction to it: 'Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas - only I don't know exactly what they are!' well illustrates Lacan's thesis that the production of sense rather than meaning is the primary function of the signifier. He had already been anticipated in this by Freud's *Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious*. Who is the subject that grasps the sense of a joke and ratifies this with a burst of laughter well before the ego-functions of intelligence and judgement have found any meaning in it. The search for meaning is, for Lacan, the bane of contemporary psychoanalysis and what condemns it to the platitudinous psychologisms that have given it its poor reputation in the eyes of those who are seriously concerned with the human condition.

There is something positively uncanny about Lacan's articulation of the human subject. Already Freud had unsettled us with his simple question when he asked about the dream: 'Who is wishing?' and went on to illustrate the uncertainty of the position of the human subject with the story about the husband and wife who were offered three wishes and wasted them by their contradictory velleities. In psychoanalysis, it seems, we are not dealing with the flesh and blood figure before us but rather with something insubstantial which only manifests itself in a pulsation that can be detected, for example, in a slip of the tongue. Nor are we concerned with his history in the way we had always assumed when we thought we had understood Freud's analogy, in the Dora case, of human history as a river which sometimes runs overground and then disappears for long stretches of time only to reappear again many miles away. The practical therapeutic aim of undoing amnesias and restoring a continuity to the

patient's story seemed to therapists to contain a wisdom that fitted in with the goal of helping our interlocutors to assume the reality of their own existence.

After all it is every analyst's experience that the undoing of repressions, which had created a pathogenic kernel that allowed intellectual or somatic functions to be withdrawn from conscious control, is followed by positive therapeutic effects. The patient after several years of work perhaps recovers the memory of a particular day when at the age of six or seven she was subjected to a revolting sexual assault and to threats to her life in order to ensure her silence. Little by little more details of the event emerge and alongside the horror and disgust there is a feeling of relief and freedom that at last a truth had emerged that gave meaning to otherwise inexplicable reactions to her sexual behaviour as an adult. But is this schema of infantile trauma as cause of adult symptomatology - criticised by Grünbaum and rejected by many perceptive clinicians - the whole story or does the Freudian notion of the repression of traumatic memories in the aetiology of neurosis need to be refined?

Lacan thinks it does. He takes the lead from Freud himself in demonstrating that it is not strictly speaking plastic memories of traumatic incidents that are repressed but rather desire-bearing phonemes. If we take the Signorelli case as the model for the mechanism of forgetting which lies at the basis of repression, there is no doubt that Freud always remained completely aware of the stories of death and sexual impotence which he had withheld from his travelling companion. What had escaped his conscious control were not these memories but rather a number of phonemes clustered around the word Signor and its German translation and the fact that it was they that were repressed was signalled by his inability to reproduce the name of the painter. They are in fact the signifiers that represent the subject - Freud - for other signifiers and it is as such that they are withdrawn from consciousness. It had always struck readers as puzzling that the memories of impotence and suicide - or for example the worry about an unwanted pregnancy in the *aliquis* example - should be considered as unconscious when they were clearly being simply withheld out of considerations of decorum. But the idea that it is the phonemes that are repressed seems to give a much more plausible ring to

Freud's argumentation when it is complemented by Lacan's notion of analysis as being a return to the signifying origin of desire.

Poord'jeli and the mystery of the proper name

This may be an appropriate place to refer to the debate around a well-known case reported by Serge Leclaire which occupies a good deal of the early part of the seminar. The discussion centres around a meaningless word produced by an obsessional patient which Leclaire claims to be the closest that one can get to the way in which a signifier is preserved in the unconscious and acts as a representative of the subject. *Poord'jeli* can of course be teased out in a way that uncovers meaningful elements that relate to the patient's history: the 'poor' containing a reference to the initial of his first name and to the fact that he was often called 'poor Paul' - an allusion which passes almost directly into English; the *je* is the French T and the 'li' echoes both the name of his nurse 'Lili' and the 'li' which alludes the *lit* (bed) and the *licorne* (unicorn) of his most significant dream. Thus the apparently meaningless ejaculation can be reduced to a number of meaningful memories in much the same way as the Ratman's *Giselasamen*.

But the importance of this signifier lies not so much in the meanings to which it can be referred but to its sense in relation to the subject. In Lacan's classic formula it represents not just something for someone but the subject for another signifier. In the debates that swirled around the exact status of this production - is it a basic phantasy, is it a dream element - Lacan seems to me to introduce an evocative and utilisable notion by insisting that *poord'jeli* fulfils the function of a proper name and that like a proper name it is a memorial of the act of nomination.

Lacan does not deny that there is a certain arbitrariness in the proper name nor that it has the function of denoting a particular individual. This is the position taken up by Bertrand Russell who argues that the best example of the proper name would be the pronoun 'that'. What the psychoanalyst is, however, in a position to insist on, over against the logician, is the intimate link between someone's proper name and their

sense of identity. Names may be arbitrary and they may occasionally have meanings but they are above all charged with sense and are the prime example of signifiers that represent the subject in the world of discourse.

Octave Mannoni provided the seminar with a striking illustration of this attachment of the name to the subject in his account of an attempt he made to change the name of a character in a novel he was writing after having realised that the name he had chosen was that of a distinguished literary critic.

[T]his is the obscure fact that I can only note: I could not change the name of Venaïsson. It seemed to me that he was called Venaïsson and that I could do nothing about it and was not involved in it. He defended his name like Sosie before Mercury. I knew well that it was I who had given him the name but he answered me to say, as it were, like Sosie, that he had always had it. I was obliged to leave it to him.⁷

Freud's subject and Frege's 1

Taking advantage, perhaps, of the mathematical sophistication of his new audience Lacan adds to his notion of the subject of the *cogito* and of the proper name a further dimension taken from the work of Gottlob Frege. First, Yves Duroux and then, Jacques-Alain Miller present to the seminar an account of his *Foundations of Arithmetic* which has been described by his English publisher as 'the first philosophically sound discussion of number in Western civilisation'.

The key similarity between Freud's account of the subject and Frege's discussion of number seems to lie in the notion of identity - just as Frege tries to establish the notion of numerical identity so Freud strives to articulate the way in which a subject can be said to have his or her own identity, oneness. This may seem to be a spurious question and if one is content to rely on imagination instead of logic it may seem to be a superfluous one. For the imagination, any individual object in space and

⁷J. Lacan, op.cit, 31 March 65, 9.

time is sufficient to ground the notion of one. But Frege demonstrated that in fact number generates the individual rather than the reverse and that to establish the notion of one it is first necessary to establish the concept of zero.

Lacan, applying this to psychoanalysis, argues that the subject of the unconscious is a one that originates in zero. The value of this is that it helps us to preserve the non-representational dimension of the subject which is so difficult to sustain if one remains at the level of imagination. Linking this to his previous proposition that the signifier, as opposed to the sign, represents the subject for another signifier, he can now go on to say that just as each of the natural numbers acts as a zero for its successor, so also the subject is like a zero that is transported from signifier to signifier. Whatever the complexity of these formulations, they have the practical advantage of halting our thinking on its slide into the false assumption that the being who is speaking to us is in some way an integrated individual, rather than one who is radically split because of the existence of the unconscious.

It also gives a foundation to Lacan's thesis that even though the psychoanalyst deals with what is singular rather than what is a particular example of the general - the thirty eight year old single woman - his operation can be a scientific one in the sense that modern conjectural sciences, such as mathematics, are scientific.

[T]he status of this singular can only be completed in the formulation of the logic to which analytic truth and practice gives us access ... which might be called, if I succeed, this logic to formalise desire. That is why I wanted the remarks about proper names to be completed by this modern logic of numeration, where it also appears that it is essentially in the function of lack, in the concept of zero itself that there takes root the possibility of this foundation of the numerical unit as such.⁸

⁸ibid, 5 May 65, 2.

The subject, knowledge and sex

'Descartes' grounding of his individual existence in the *cogito*, Frege's derivation of the one from the zero, and a notion of the proper name that he would claim finds its roots in Plato's *Cratylus*, are the principle sources from which Lacan tries to derive support for the Freudian notion of the subject of the unconscious and thus lay the basis for a logical legitimation of psychoanalytic action. This by no means exhausts his discussion on the subject and towards the end of the year he introduces it into a new triad which he sees as the essential reference points for the psychoanalytic clinic that he is trying to develop. The repressed knowledge of sex, of sexual trauma, has from the beginning of psychoanalysis been seen as the root cause of neurotic symptoms and the undoing of that repression has traditionally been considered to be the central role of the analyst. Lacan's linking of the subject to the two reference points of knowledge and sex thus goes to the very heart of psychoanalytic practice and is going to form the basis for a re-evaluation of its efficacy.

Lacan speaks of the three terms as being in a relationship of circular dominance and illustrates it with a playful analogy:

Like the game of love, of *amora*, where scissors, stone and paper catch up on one another in a round, stone breaking scissors, paper enveloping stone, scissors cutting paper ...⁹

Since we have already considered at length the notion of the subject we will leave it to one side for a moment although the interdependence of the three terms will ensure that it will be continually present in the discussion.

Knowledge

The category of knowledge is a central one in classical psychoanalysis but the tendency that we marked in the beginning of using

⁹ *ibid*, 11 May 65, 1.

psychoanalytic research as a way of providing the analyst with a wide-ranging and subtle classificatory system - as best incarnated perhaps in Fenichel's Psychoanalytic theory of neurosis - is strongly criticised by Lacan. The fact that the patient approaches the analyst in the expectation that the latter from his education and experience knows about his condition in the way that a medical or psychological specialist does, is no excuse for him answering a demand to be understood and treated according to tried and tested methods. Naturally, an analysis will not even begin unless the patient sees in the analyst someone who knows, installs him, in Lacan's terminology, in the position of the 'subject supposed to know'. But the analyst uses this primary transference not in order to give weight to his diagnosis and treatment plan, but in order to engage the subject in a certain type of conversation:

[I]t is his radical position as subject that is involved when we say that, at the foundations of analysis, he ought to be the subject who is supposed to know ... this can only, given the outlines that Freud gave us about the psychoanalytic situation, represent nothing other than a certain availability that he provides in the order of the signifier, and this of course is not without a response, an echo, a preparation in the way that I define a signifier for you, and not without reason, as being what represents the subject for another signifier.¹⁰

This availability in the order of the signifier is not necessarily what the patient has come for but the initial transference is there to help him see whether he can in fact comply with the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis to say whatever it is that occurs to him. But the rationale for this method is also contained in the passage just quoted if we remember that in this case the signifier which represents the subject for another signifier is his symptom. The symptom is not a sign which reveals something to an observer - early wakening indicating depression - but is precisely something which carries something of the subject which is,

¹⁰ *ibid*, 11 May 65,1.

in a sense, seeking the other signifier for which it is destined - Dora's aphonia relating to the 'being alone' with the adored Mrs K.

The symptom results from the fact that the subject has refused a knowledge and it is with this refusal that the unconscious is born. Or rather to be more precise, with Lacan, there is a double refusal. The first is a *Verwerfen*, a foreclosure, from which the subject is established and the second is a *Verdrängen*, a repression, which gives rise to a particular symptom. But the subject can only refuse what it has already avowed and it is in that sense that one can say that the symptom is related to a knowledge even though it is a knowledge of which the subject wants to know nothing.

[T]hanks to the extraordinarily rich and complex construction of a symptom, what I show as symptom proves that I know what obstacle I am dealing with; alongside that, my thoughts and my phantasies are constructed not alone as if I knew nothing about it, but as if I wished to know nothing about it. This is the *Entzweiung*.¹¹

The introduction of this new German term - which means literally to split in two - to describe the relation of a subject to his knowledge is important for Lacan in that it contains, in a way, the core of the Freudian discovery and one that is not sufficiently articulated in clinical work.

If there is a *Zwang*, if there is something which manifests itself in an opaque fashion in the symptom, which literally constrains, at the same time as it divides the subject, here it is important to use the word *Zwang*, because *Zwang* refers to *zwei* and ... it is indeed an *Entzweiung*, it is this that Freud pursued, discovered, tracked down to the extent that his last writing culminates at it, in the idea of the of the subject, which is essentially an *Entzweiung*.¹¹

¹¹ *ibid*, 9 June 65, 9.

¹² *ibid*, 1-2,

It is this split which grounds the analyst's belief that no matter how confidently he may feel he could classify the patient as hysterical, obsessional or phobic, that in the concrete, and from the point of view of therapeutic effectiveness, he knows only half of the symptom. No matter how brilliant may be the diagnosis and treatment plan produced by a psychiatrist on the basis of what he sees in or hears from a patient, it is necessarily incomplete, in that he is reading the symptom as a sign rather than a signifier and this is, Lacan argues, what psychoanalysis ought to have brought to psychiatry, instead of being itself brought - bought - over to the generalisations of statistical probabilities. It is only along the path of a conversation of a particular kind that the other signifying components of the symptom can be brought to light and Lacan illustrates this point with a number *oi* well-known vignettes from Freud's case histories: Dora's aphonia referred to above; her cough which through the *Vermogen* allusion to her father linked up to the signifier of the style of sexual relations he was able to enjoy with Mrs K; the suicidal slimming regime of the Ratman designed to eliminate the Dick who was too present to his beloved or indeed his rat phantasy which was only finally elucidated when related to the 'rat' in *hieraten* and so on.

It is this reference to a knowledge implicit in the symptom, which has to be located in another signifier, that leads Lacan to affirm that the first step in the establishment of a properly psychoanalytic clinic is for the interchange with the patient to be conducted as a conversation rather than as an examination. The symptom is not an individual experience either in its origin or its elucidation. But this does not mean that he favours a personalist or phenomenological dialogue based on a 'respect' for the human person. The truth that is proper to this subject must be related to science and this is what will lead him to assert in subsequent years that the subject the psychoanalyst has to deal with is the subject of science.

This introduction of the word truth highlights the crucial problem of the relationship between truth and knowledge. For Lacan there is a dialectical relationship between them but what the Freudian articulation shows us is a divergent relationship between this truth and this knowledge. For Lacan, it was Descartes' remitting of truth into the hands of God that freed science from its entanglements with the search for truth

and allowed it to become a instrument for the production of knowledge. A major problem for philosophy since Descartes has been the question of how a subject can sustain an identity in the face of this all-pervasive knowledge. This is the real tragedy of the path that psychoanalysis has taken in submitting itself to the dominance of a de-subjectivised human science and confirming still further the alienation of modern man in the abstract categories in which it tries to confine him.

It has often been remarked that Freud replaced the *cogito* of Descartes with a *desidero* which, while expressing a lack, contains a sense of dynamism that is absent from Descartes' radically denuded subject. Lacan considers that Freud has made an even more decisive contribution in emphasising that this *desidero* is fundamentally sexual and that sexuality introduces into the infinite possibilities opened up by science a note of impossibility which stops the vertiginous explosion of meanings and opens up to the subject the real of his own sexual desire.

What is involved in the analytic operation is the real of desire ... in the first place, phenomenologically, this presents itself to us as being the field of the impossible.¹³

Sex

Implicit in the discussion about the subject's refusal of knowledge is that what is refused is a knowledge of sex. The advance of the biological and human sciences has meant that our knowledge of sex has become enormously enriched and this scientific knowledge is not without its relevance to psychoanalysts even though, Lacan claims that our scientific publications show little evidence of our awareness of what is being achieved in these fields. But despite their relevance, these findings cannot replace a properly psychoanalytic investigation of the real of sex in accordance with its own methods which are those of speech.

The truth about sex is to be said', but because 'sex, in its essence as radical difference ... sets its face against knowledge'¹⁴ this is an impossible

¹³ *ibid*, 5 May 65, 10.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 19 May 65, 3.

task. It is precisely here that Lacan argues that we see the fruitfulness of the *o*-object as precisely what constitutes a remainder which cannot be articulated in language. What the phobic dreads, what the fetishist turns around, what demolishes the hysteric, what we grasp when we get the point of a joke, this *o*-object is also what sustains our fundamental sexual phantasies and is the key to the subject's relationship to the real of sexual difference.

Every time the subject finds his truth, he changes what he finds into the *o* object. This indeed is the drama, which is absolutely without precedent, into which analytic experience pushes us.¹⁵

This drama without precedent has not been fully exploited by psychoanalysis in that while it goes beyond the age-old philosophical dictum that 'When I say man, I also embrace woman', it has so far approached the mystery of sexual difference only through a series of metaphors - active and passive, seeing and being seen, penetrating and being penetrated - so that essence of sexual difference remains elusive. To non-analysts - and indeed to many analysts - this is a spurious problem, since it is clear to them that a man is a man and a woman is a woman: 'Male and female he created them', said Ernest Jones, citing one of the oldest texts of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. For imagination and intuition the question of sexual difference is as easily resolved as the decision of which loo you should go into, or, at a slightly more sophisticated level, the question of the one at the basis of numeration. And this reference to Frege brings us back indeed to the fashion in which Lacan seems to suggest we can go beyond the metaphorical dyads to which we have so far been confined, dyads which are based on an imaginary ego-to-ego relationship, towards a truer apprehension of what is involved for the subject in his or her relationship to sexuality.

What psychoanalysis shows us is that the sense of what can be said about sex comes from not from a meaning mediated by knowledge but

¹⁵ *ibid*, 9 June 65, 11.

from a direct relationship of the subject with sexed being. This can perhaps be most vividly illustrated by the burst of laughter in immediate response to a well-told joke which, we know since Freud, is an expression of the real of the sexual drive. But it is also there in all the other formations of the unconscious - dreams, slips and forgettings - by which we introduce the subject to the truth latent in his unconscious. These demonstrate the split that psychoanalysis finds at the heart of every human subject, and what they lead us towards is the relationship of the subject with sex, and to the experiential fact that whatever the sex of the subject may be, this relationship is expressed in what we call castration.

It is in the measure that there is negated, precisely, the copula, the instrument of conjunction, that the subject, whatever he may be, is integrated into the truth of sex ...¹⁶

The bipolarity of sex is such that it makes imaginary closure impossible not only at the level of theory but also in terms of what are called interpersonal relations. The phallic instrument that promises to make one out of two must be negated if the subject is to reach the real of sex as opposed to delusions about it. In a sense this brings us back to the bedrock of the Oedipus Complex and its successful dissolution as being necessary for the assumption of male or female sexual identity. Failing this integration into the truth of sex, the identity of the subject and the maturation of his or her desire remain unanchored abstractions and this is memorably illustrated when Michelle Montrelay and Lacan present the enigmatic figure of Lol V Stein to the seminar in the final session of the year.

But sexual difference, which for Lacan is the essence of sex, is presented here not so much in terms of the assumption of a positive male or female ego ideal, seen as a precondition for a harmonious relationship between the sexes - a psychologisation of the discoveries of psychoanalysis - but in terms of a lack that sustains the subject as desiring. The neutral assurance of existence achieved by the subject in Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*

¹⁶ *ibid*, 16 June 65, 5.

which was complemented in Freud's *desidero* by the affirmation that this being was sexed is now further advanced by Lacan in the invitation and challenge to those who undertakes the asceticism of the analytic path to say how this concerns each of us in our own singular experience.

Address for correspondence:

*APPI
School of Psychotherapy
St. Vincent's Hospital
Elm Park
Dublin 4*