

## LACAN'S INVENTION

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Lacan was always concerned with what was distinctive about psychoanalysis, with what is new with psychoanalysis, and why it is justifiable to speak of the *Freudian* discovery. This concern occupied him no less in *Les non-dupes errent*. During his seminar of 11th December 1973 he speaks of the effect of Freud's discovery. He says that the possibility of analytic discourse tells us that '*what you do, far from being a matter of ignorance, is always determined. Determined already by something which is knowledge, and that we call the unconscious.*'<sup>1</sup> This is what is new with Freud. This founds a new discourse.

In the first seminar of that year Lacan had directed attention to the final paragraph of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He reads Freud as finishing this inaugural text with a question not about the '*divinatory value of dreams*'<sup>2</sup> but about the effect of this new way of responding to dreams. In short Freud is asking what will happen to the new discourse inaugurated by *The Interpretation of Dreams*. We know that one consequence of that text is our meeting and speaking here today.

Whether in the *Rome discourse* where he identifies the function and field of speech and language as the domain of this practice originated by Freud or in his Seminars where time and again he distinguishes psychoanalysis from other forms of psychological intervention, Lacan remained acutely aware of the particularity of the Freudian legacy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Les non-dupes errent / The names of the father 1973 - 1974, Book XXI*, translated by Cormac Gallagher. Unpublished. Session of 11th December 1973, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit. Session of 13th November 1973, p. 14. Lacan is referring to S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, S.E., V.

<sup>3</sup> We know he was especially concerned with practices which described themselves as psychoanalytic but which had turned their back on Freud's work.

In the eleventh week of *Les non-dupes errent* Lacan turns the question upon himself. He asks what his invention has been. 'I will answer,' he says, 'like that, to get things going, the little o-object.'<sup>4</sup>

He says his starting point is different from where other knowledge came to be invented in the history of science because his starting point is 'that of analytic experience.'<sup>5</sup> The phrase analytic experience here is noteworthy in that it can refer to one's practice as well as one's undergoing of analysis.

Regarding his invention he is very specific: 'It is not among others that I invented the o-object, among other things, as some people imagine. Because the o-object is solidary, is solidary at least at the start with the graph.'<sup>6</sup> He is referring to the graph of desire, the schema within which the object first began to emerge in the Seminars of the 1950s. Lacan goes on to mention other formulations in which the o-object played a fundamental role: the Schema L, the four discourses and the quantifying formulae for sexualisation. All that to say that this is an announcement we cannot ignore in so far as we choose to attend to Lacan's psychoanalytic teaching. Particularly if our own experience of analysis would have us recognise the purchase of Lacan's theory on the articulation of our subjective lives.

This announcement in *Seminar XXI* reminded me of the conclusion to my reading of *Seminar X, Anxiety* last year because there, too, the centrality of the function of the o-object for Lacan's teaching was very evident.<sup>7</sup>

In that Seminar Lacan indicates that the function of the o-object announces itself in the field of the symptom. Analysis offers the

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<sup>4</sup> J. Lacan. op.cit. 1973-1974. Session of 9<sup>th</sup> April 1974, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* *Solidary* is a striking adjective here. It is more evocative than the similar sounding *solitary* with the sense of a singular interest as well as joint and several responsibility. It is a cognate of the noun 'solidarity'.

<sup>7</sup> c.f. B. O' Donnell. 'Symptom and Anxiety'. In *The Letter*, issue 31, Summer 2004, pp. 67-78. There is another connection between the end of *Seminar X, Anxiety* and *Seminar XXI, Les non-dupes errent*. In the Autumn following the former the subsequently interrupted Seminar *Les noms du père* was begun.

opportunity of articulating the symptom, letting the symptom emerge. Speaking of the symptom as emerging is important to note at a time when we may feel a demand to respond therapeutically to the symptoms of our time. This indicates the difference between an understanding of the symptom as a logical linguistic formation of the unconscious which can situate us in our reality in our own singular way, and an understanding of the symptom as a behaviour or experience. Psychoanalysis tells us that this is not the way the symptom necessarily functions. It can take years for the symptom to let itself be articulated so that it can be recognised and taken on. In relation to this point the title of the Seminar *Les non-dupes errent* can refer to those who wander, deluded in their sense of not being duped, and yet subject to the malaise of civilisation, the subjective unease borne witness to by the formations of the unconscious and the manifestations of the sense of guilt. Furthermore in *Seminar XXI* Lacan observes: '*The analytic discourse does not at all consist in making what is not working out re-enter normal discourse.*'<sup>8</sup> In other words analytic discourse is not normalising.

How are we to respond to Lacan's statement that his one invention is the o-object? Specifically, relating it to the work that we purport to do, and paraphrasing Freud, I ask how do we handle the o-object in analytic work? The paraphrase is justified by the implication of the transference in the position taken regarding the o-object. Reading Lacan not only brings to our attention the question of the function of the o-object for the analysand, it also requires us to articulate the o-object of the analyst. This functions in the desire of the analyst in that its effect determines the analyst's fundamental relation, which is the relation to psychoanalysis.

The challenge I find myself faced with is to not trot out pieties about the *objet a* or other Lacanian terms in learned papers, class-rooms, etc. I was struck by an observation by Mustafa Safouan in a recent paper, *The Formation of the Psychoanalyst*. He recalled Lacan's unease about 'Lacanian' having become an identificatory trait '*permitting the members of the group to recognise themselves or to measure each other with shots of*

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* Session of 12th February 1974, p. 13.

*Lacanspeak*.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting how the language of bar-room intoxication expresses this. The challenge is to work to articulate through our own analytic experience the function of the o-object and its purchase in our clinical work.

In *Seminar X* Lacan teaches a lot about the o-object. Indeed Lacan takes the risk of his account being formalised into a programme as he catalogues the incarnations of the o-object in terms of the breast, the turd, the phallus, the look, and the voice.

Along with this and therefore implicated in the function of the o-object throughout these weeks of the Seminar on *Anxiety* Lacan addresses the difference between the man and the woman. This is prior to his formulae for sexuation and his statement that there is no sexual relationship. I believe, however, that these later formulations are adumbrated in this Seminar. He says that woman is closer to *jouissance*, describing her as 'doubly determined' by it and that the *jouissance* of man and woman are not organically conjoined. In other words, the support of desire,  $-\phi$ , is not designed for sexual union. On this question Lacan presents the following scenario. He describes a possible response by the woman to the inevitable failure of man's desire in the following way: the failure of man's desire leads woman to the idea of having the man's organ. The phallus does not realise the meeting of desires. It becomes the common locus of anxiety. A Freudian analysis could end with the woman demanding of the analyst a penis in order to do better than the man. She seduces by offering to the desire of the man the object involved in "phallic claims". In other words the woman takes the position of having, if not being, the phallus. With this offer of omnipotence she forgets, and is therefore alienated from her own *jouissance*. Lacan says that this involves straying from the *jouissance* of woman. This move towards an identification with the man elides the difference between the sexes and gives access to an enjoyment which approximates to what she imagines to

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<sup>9</sup> M. Safouan. 'On the Formation of the Psychoanalyst', delivered in Strasbourg, November 2003, translated by Marie Claude Hayes and Martin Winn. Available at [www.apres-coup.org](http://www.apres-coup.org).

be the *jouissance* of the other (small o). This is the basis for the egalitarian approach to sexual relations which demands that both parties enjoy equally. This account anticipates Lacan's later statement that there is no sexual relation. Strikingly the particular week of the seminar in which this line of thought is elaborated ended in a silence noted by Lacan at the beginning of the subsequent one. Lacan suggests that this was due to the seminar provoking castration anxiety.<sup>10</sup>

In these same weeks Lacan focuses on the desire of the obsessional. He says that the obsessional's inner commandments are particularly favourable for linking the o-object, desire and anxiety. The aim of the Seminar X was to elaborate the relations between these three terms. In what follows I would like to follow Lacan's account of the o-object and the obsessional in the last weeks of *Seminar X*. The discussion makes use of the grid elaborated in the course of that year's Seminar.

	Difficulty →		
Movement →	Inhibition	Impediment	Embarrassment
	Emotion	Symptom	<i>Passage-à-l'acte</i>
	<i>Émoi</i>	Acting-out	Anxiety

He describes how the obsessional's '*desire to retain*' is inaugurated by and organised around the demands from the Other during potty-training. This desire, he says, intervenes as a defence. This happens with the introduction of inhibition. This is the introduction of '*a different desire to the one the (excretory) function satisfies naturally.*'<sup>11</sup> This 'inhibiting' desire acts

<sup>10</sup> J. Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Anxiety, 1962-1963, Book X*. Unpublished. Trans. Cormac Gallagher. c.f. Sessions of 29th May 1963 to 3rd July 1963.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* 26th June 1963.

as a defence against another desire. Referring to the next concept in the grid along from inhibition on the axis of difficulty, namely impediment, Lacan says that this is not the '*reduplication of inhibition*' but rather the impeding of the inhibition: '*...the subject is quite impeded in retaining his desire to retain.*'<sup>12</sup>

Emotion - the position below inhibition on the axis of movement - Lacan describes as '*the experiences based on being confronted with a task...namely the subject does not know how to respond.*'<sup>13</sup> The object being '*object and derisory*' explains the '*wrong directions ... mistaken paths ... lateral divergences*' that make the search for the object go on indefinitely, which constitutes the acting-out of the obsessional. This position is supported by and realised through the symptom of doubt.<sup>14</sup> Lacan goes on to describe embarrassment as a moment of encounter with '*the question of the cause.*'<sup>15</sup> This moment of rupture, as it is called elsewhere in the Seminar, is the door through which the obsessional enters the transference.<sup>16</sup>

Lacan situates anxiety between desire and *jouissance*, separating the two. Castration anxiety is the '*only level at which anxiety is produced at the very locus of the lack of the object*'<sup>17</sup> It is to avoid, or substitute for, an encounter with this vacant place that the obsessional takes up a desire organised around the anal object, the excremental *o*, cause of desire to retain. This position is supported by inhibition. This sheds light on the obsessional's phantasies of oblativity, sacrifice and gift: '*For, of course, everyone would love to think that genital union is a gift: I give myself, you give yourself, we give ourselves. Unfortunately there is no trace of gift in a genital*

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 10. paraphrased.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> In the analysis of the obsessional Lacan proposes that there needs to be a rupture for the symptom to be approached. This mobilises the *o*-object. This break in routines of action and thought is required for there to emerge a demand for analysis. Lacan goes through most of the positions on the grid. He indicates dismay with reference to the Wolfman's reaction of anal dismay to the primal scene.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p. 11.

*copulatory act, however successful you may imagine it to be.*<sup>18</sup> The organisation of desire around the excremental o is '*designed to hold back the subject on the edge of the castrating hole ...*'<sup>19</sup> This is what Lacan means by describing the desire of the obsessional as an 'underlay of desire...'<sup>20</sup>

The seminar elaborates further on this 'excremental' or 'cedable' object. How does the anal object become to be such, or, as Lacan asks, '*along what lines does excrement enter into subjectification?*'<sup>21</sup> The answer is striking. At the moment of the trauma, Lacan says, the subject "cedes" to the situation by giving something up. The object is deemed *cedable* and there is a choice whether to hold onto it or to let it go. The description of the object as *cedable* can apply to the oral object - the nipple - and the phallic object. Lacan refers to the traumatic dream of the Wolfman. In the dream it is not known where the phallus is and at the same time it is all there as indicated by the tree covered with wolves. *Jouissance* here is intolerable because it goes beyond any possible "mapping out" by the subject. The subject becomes nothing but erection. The o-object as phallus is entirely absent or entirely present. No wonder the Wolfman has recourse to the anal object in the economy of his erotic life.

There is more to this which I have not managed to represent in this quite disjointed account. The Seminar requires to be revisited. The weeks of *Seminar X* which I have referred to can be seen to articulate the o-object in psychoanalytic work and arguably lay the groundwork for Lacan's elaboration of the concept of the Real in subsequent years of his teaching. In relation to practice I believe these weeks of the Seminar to be required reading material when we find ourselves challenged to formulate the work that we do in terms of the obsessional and hysterical structures. Lacan puts it to us to choose whether we proceed with a premise of logical

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* Session of 19th June 1963, p. 7.

articulation or whether we rely on intuition and hunches based on the observation of forms of behaviour.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 'As regards dealing with the unconscious we are much closer to it by manipulating logic than anything else because it is of the same order.' J. Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, The non-dupes errent / The names of the father 1973 - 1974, Book XXI*. Unpublished. Trans. Cormac Gallagher. Session of 12th February 1974, p. 11.