

PSYCHOANALYTICAL NOTEBOOKS

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**A biannual publication of the London Circle of
the European School of Psychoanalysis**

***FICTIONS IN
PSYCHOANALYSIS***

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the European School of Psychoanalysis**

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CONTENTS

Editorial		5
LACANIAN ORIENTATION		
Jacques-Alain Miller	<i>The Semblant and the Real</i>	9
FICCTIONS		
Eric Laurent	<i>The Purloined Letter and the Tao of the Psychoanalyst</i>	31
Marie-Hélène Brousse	<i>The Names, the Father, the Symptom</i>	67
Pierre-Gilles Gueguen & Jacques-Alain Miller	<i>Fictions and the Partner-Symptom</i>	83
Sophie Marret	<i>Epiphanies: James Joyce and Virginia Woolf</i>	123
THE CLINIC		
Josiane Cassin	<i>The Child and the Siren</i>	145
Fabian Naparstek	<i>Toxicomania of Yesterday and Today</i>	151
Gabriela van den Hoven	<i>Toxicomania in Context</i>	163
'OEDIPUS AND BEYOND'		
From the closure of the Twinning of the London Circle of the European School of Psychoanalysis and <i>Association de la Cause Freudienne VLB</i>		
Roger Cassin	<i>The Twinning and After</i>	173
Roger Litten	<i>Desire Put to Work</i>	177
Anne Lecroart	<i>Cartel and Beyond</i>	183
Victoria Woollard	<i>Knowledge and Truth Beyond Oedipus</i>	189
Philippe Carpentier	<i>Pregnant Space of The Bush</i>	199
Richard Klein	<i>Enjoyment of the Empty Box</i>	207
Jean-Luc Monnier	<i>Beyond Oedipus: the Question of Femininity</i>	215
BOOK REVIEW		221

EDITORIAL

In this issue, the last to be published under the auspices of the European School of Psychoanalysis, several contributions have been brought together under the title: *Fictions in Psychoanalysis*. Yet, what value can be given to such a theme when Lacan clearly tells us that 'no praxis is more oriented towards... the real than psychoanalysis'?

Of course, fictions have always had a hand in psychoanalysis. One could even say that in psychoanalysis fiction presents itself as a necessary resource without which it would be impossible to grasp anything of the real that it concerns. Indeed, the term itself appears at crucial moments in the history of psychoanalysis where its radical specificity comes to the fore to pose itself in new and startling forms.

Thus, in a letter to Fliess, dated 21st September 1897, Freud states: 'there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fictions cathected with affect'. With these words Freud announced his rejection of the seduction theory and thus of his attempts to ground a theory of psychical causation upon the facts of objective reality.

Yet, it was Lacan who finally raised the value of fiction to the level of an operational concept with his formula 'truth has the structure of fiction', thereby indicating the degree to which truth is marked from the first by the relation to speech. Truth is therefore always a function of one's relation to the Other. Indeed, in this early period of Lacan's elaboration, the Other acted as a guarantor for the fictional structure of truth.

However, it was only with Lacan's redeployment of the concept of fiction in *Seminar VII* that the real at stake in psychoanalysis emerged as such and from this moment on Lacan's whole elaboration changes to accommodate the problematic of

jouissance. Here fiction emerges as the very means with which the subject organises a relation to *jouissance*.

It is this revision and its consequences that we will be concerned with in this issue. In his contribution Jacques-Alain Miller indicates the momentous nature of the shift from Lacan's early assimilation of structuralist principles to point at which the orientation of psychoanalysis is reformulated on the basis of the primacy of the real. In such a perspective fiction is seen as the means with which the subject attempts to treat the real at stake in experience to the extent that the unconscious and even the concept of psychical structure is itself seen as being part of a defensive elaboration in relation to the real through the use of the semblant.

Pierre-Giles Gueguen's contribution charts the moment of this inversion, where Lacan encounters Bentham's theory of fictions and deploys it to reorient psychoanalysis towards the real, while Eric Laurent takes up the differences between Lacan's account of 'The Purloined Letter' and the elaboration in *Lit-raterre*. Marie-Hélène Brousse takes our theme towards the contemporary clinic by demonstrating how James Elroy uses fiction to construct a relation to *jouissance* that is not based upon the Oedipus in the context of the Other which does not exist and Sophie Marret examines the use of epiphany in Joyce and Woolf from the perspective of a clinic of *jouissance*.

Philip Dravers

LACANIAN ORIENTATION

THE SEMBLANT AND THE REAL

Jacques-Alain Miller

Last time — which was also the first time (of the year) — I introduced a new algorithm, which invites us to distinguish and articulate two terms: the real and the semblant.

I proposed to oppose this algorithm to the one Lacan started from, and which distinguishes and articulates signifier and signified. I am going to reproduce this on the board:

Signifier	→	Real
Signified		Semblant

The first of these two algorithms — the one on the left — presents the advantage of having been developed by Lacan, and occupies pride of place in his *écrit*, *The Instance of the Letter*, which constitutes — as I believed I was able to state long ago — a kind of return to his inaugural text on language and speech.

It is an algorithm that Lacan gave us as summarising the contribution of structural linguistics, that is to say as that which he took at the time to be the leading science of human sciences, and one that was expressly and eminently valid with regard to psychoanalysis.

As for the second algorithm, on the contrary, I reconstitute it on the basis of the scattered indications which I have found or selected in Lacan's late teaching.

Thus, the status of the second algorithm, which we will put to work this year, is manifestly different from that of the first. It is problematic, just as the passage from the first to the second is problematic, and all the more so since, while the first

one is said to be foundational of a scientific practice, the second one would rather tend to question all scientific practices.

In any case, the second algorithm, in a way, places the real out of the reach of all that is of the order of discourse, stirring up the idea that all that is of the order of discourse undermines our concept of science in relation to a notion of the real which, so to speak, escapes it by definition.

The second algorithm, problematic, which I deduced, which Lacan did not articulate as such — although I consider that it is deduced from that which he formulates —, amounts to a reversal of the first. In order to see that, let's ask ourselves: what is the semblant in question in the second algorithm?

Well, in the first analysis I would define the semblant, which the second algorithm situates as surpassed, as dominated by the real — and precisely in order to articulate these four terms —, as nothing other than the very relation of the signifier with the signified. And I will propose we combine these two formulae into one, which merely inscribes what I posed at the outset: namely, that the semblant is precisely the relation of the signifier with the signified, of all that inscribes itself of the relation of the signifier with the signified.

$$\begin{array}{c}
 R \\
 \hline
 S \\
 \hline
 s
 \end{array}
 \left. \vphantom{\begin{array}{c} R \\ S \\ s \end{array}} \right\} \text{Semblant}$$

Eminently, this concerns the status of truth in so far as truth is caught in the articulation of the signifier to the signified. Whether one prioritises the signifier or the signified in the effect of truth, truth can only be inscribed through their articulation. Further, we must also specify as much as possible the

sense to be given to the bar, which here is redoubled between the terms.

I give it the following sense, that of a domination, of a mastery, and even, exactly, of a causality. When the bar is placed between the signifier and the signified, it is not only to separate them. It is first of all meant to teach us to distribute signifier and signified, and to do this, for all phenomena. And it is because this redistribution is valid for all phenomena that it takes on an algorithmic character: in other words, it is liable, suitable, even destined to an automatic functioning.

So, concerning everything that is in question, always distinguish signifier from signified. It is this trait of automatism that warrants this redistribution its characterisation as algorithm. A signification is added to it, indicated by the fact that one situates the signifier above the signified. A signification of causality is added to it, namely that the signified depends on the signifier. And this is the value which Lacan's *écrit* on *The Instance of the Letter* gives the signifier.

What he then redistributes under the names of the mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy echoes the dominance of the signifier over the signified. Distinct effects of the signified ensue according to the way in which the signifier is articulated to another signifier. Whether the signifier is substituted for or connected to another signifier entails a different signified effect. When there is a substitution of a signifier for another signifier, there is a signified metaphoric effect, when a signifier is connected to another signifier there is a signified metonymic effect.

In both cases the algorithm inscribes the dependence of the second term in relation to the first. If I wrote the algorithm as I did, it is because I intend to target a relation of the same order, according to which the real dominates the semantic articulation of the signifier to the signified, according to which the real gets the upper hand over the semblant.

It is simple, and in any case it is neat, tidy. If it is also true, it allows us to inscribe the following proposition of Lacan's in a continuity, without surprise: the real is stronger than the true, surmounts the true, gets the upper hand over the true in so far as the true stems from the articulation between signifier and signified. In any case, it rides Lacan's proposition of what appears to be, at first sight, its oracular aspect, and delineates the configuration in which the real is inscribed and from which it can be deduced.

Retroactively, the first algorithm, the classical algorithm of *The Instance of the Letter* takes on the following sense, which I summarise and explicate as follows.

$$\begin{array}{c} S \\ [\text{---}] \\ s \\ \hline R \end{array}$$

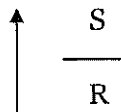
I say that Lacan's point of departure is that the semblant dominates the real. In saying that, I perform a kind of retroaction from Lacan's point of arrival, which is at the same time a vanishing point, since it is without conclusion, without quilting point. I make the perspectives that Lacan opens at the end of his teaching retro-act back onto the beginning of his teaching.

The principle according to which the semblant dominates the real is, in a way, the very principle of structuralism. The structuralism in question is the one which Lacan received as gift, as heirloom, which he took from the hands of Lévi-Strauss. And what is striking at the beginning of Lacan's teaching is the confidence he has in Jakobson's structuralism as revised by Lévi-Strauss, and in particular on this point which reduces the real precisely, it seems to me, to a dealing of hands comparable to the one that takes place at the beginning of a game of cards.

When Lévi-Strauss speaks about the real, it is, for example, the geography of a territory inhabited by a population, or the diverse origins of this population, or the different locations where it settles, and which are liable to be noted as objective facts. If you want me to incarnate it at the individual level, the real is the hump of King Richard in Shakespeare. That is to say that he has it on his back from the beginning, and he had no choice in the matter — it was assigned or dealt out to him. It could have been a club-foot, a missing limb, anything that deviates from the norm and which turns this trait into a peculiarity — a peculiarity which King Richard will turn into the motive of his complaint, and thanks to which he feels authorised, justified in acting in contravention with a certain number of principles, prejudices, since this hump has been assigned to him as his affliction. And he gives it a sense, precisely, as Shakespeare's play shows that it can have consequences which go well beyond his individuality, since he puts the Kingdom of England to fire and sword on the basis of the real of his hump.

The other meanings one can give a hump are legion. It so happens that during the holidays I read the memoirs of Casanova where, amongst other adventures, a pretty hunchback figures — someone afflicted by a double hump not only on her back but also on her front. As Casanova notes, it was a young woman who knew admirably well how to put her humps to good use. She succeeded in becoming eminently desirable with her two humps. It is difficult! It is especially difficult concerning the hump on the front, difficult for sexual *jouissance*, but all the more interesting. Here then is a character who had not turned her double hump into a motive of complaint. We could counterpoise it to Richard, saying that it is, on the contrary, an element of seduction. And this is why Casanova swallows the bait, and congratulates himself on the acrobatics he performs in order to be able to possess the lovely double hunchback — this being a change from the ordinariness of his adventures.

This is the real! The structuralist real is conceived as a distribution of elements, which is to say that it is already finalised by the signifier. In Lévi-Strauss, there are those who live upstairs and those who live downstairs, and this naturally gives rise to a signifying opposition, which is to say that the elements in which the real is distributed from the outset are destined to serve as signifiers. In the structuralism constructed by Lévi-Strauss, and which Lacan adopted, the real is destined to deliver the elements which will signify to the signifier, the symbolic order.

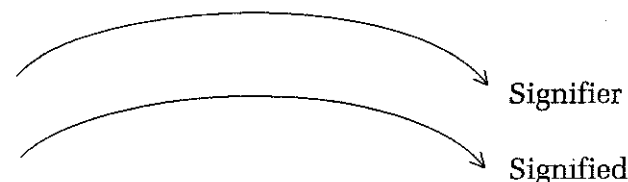


This is what it means to serve as signifier — the elements serve as signifier. This means that the real signifies, that the real — in a way — and through what we could call a pre-established harmony, is meant to signify. There is a transmutation of the real into the signifier.

This was bound to hold Lacan's attention, since we could say that, in the analytic experience, this is effectively how the real presents itself, in the manner of a dealing of hands which has not been the object of a choice, of a selection, but which, by the very virtue of being inscribed in discourse, engenders, delivers significations.

The height of signification in the individual order is destiny. Destiny means that the subject elaborates a signification which includes what he is to live, to experience, on the basis of the dealing of hands of the real. This transmutation is a transformation, it is precisely a change in the status of the real into signifiers. You will find it indicated in the third chapter of *Séminaire IV: La relation d'objet*, the chapter which I entitled *Le signifiant et le Saint-Esprit*, and which indicates a double

level, that of the signifier and that of the signified, thus conforming to what Lacan developed as algorithm.



But what I would like to draw your attention to concerning this elementary schema is that it implies something that is not indicated on this graph, and which is the transmutation of the real.

If you were to re-read the presentation of the schema in Chapter III, you would see that this schema, which conforms to the algorithm proposed by Lacan, implies as watermark an operation which concerns the real but which is not explicitly developed as such.

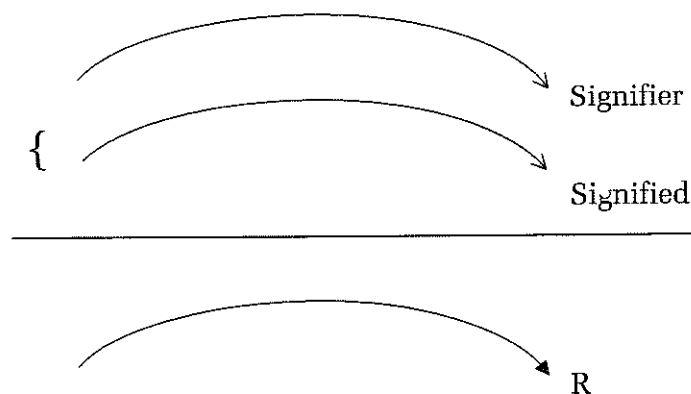
It concerns (the reference is page 48 of *Seminar III*) the libido in particular. "Libido", says Lacan, "always bears the imprint of the signifier". In passing, this is the direction which will lead Lacan to present the drive as a signifying chain a few years later. It is already sign-posted there, we have the starting point of this construction.

He uses many terms which he considers to be more or less equivalent to that of libido, including the term *envy* — which comes from Melanie Klein — and already indicates there that envy becomes signified. I can already see in this an intimation of what he will carry out later on, namely the construction of the concept of desire as being the signified of the signifying chain of the drive.

Given the angle from which I approach the question, let me underline what you will find on page 48, namely the reservation inscribed there by Lacan, and whose consequences and developments he will only articulate later.

"This does not exclude the possibility", he says, "for there to be something else in the drive or in envy, something which would not in the least bear the imprint of the signifier".

I think that this puts us to the task of representing, in the form of a vector — since this is how he inscribes them —, the instance of the real as marked by the signifier converted into the signified, without for all that being able to absolutely exclude the possibility of a remainder which does not participate in this functioning.



It remains that, in conformity with the structuralist perspective, Lacan was at first essentially attached to the articulation between signifier and signified, namely to what of the real is transmuted into the signifier, and possibly converted into the signified of this signifier.

Hence the value of the term which translates this transmutation and which is the term: 'signifierisation' (*signifiantisation*). It precisely translates the dominance of the semblant over the

real, the raising [*l'élévation*] — the term is Lacan's — of the real to the quality of the signifier.

Looking at it closely, we see that this signifierisation includes two operations. Firstly, the real is conceived as an element, that is to say, it is precisely 'elementised'. Nothing indicates, at the outset, that the real presents itself in the form of separate elements, amenable to becoming signifiers. We must therefore distinguish the operation which elementises the real, the operation which makes the real present itself in the guise of elements distinct from one another. Initially then, signifierisation is an elementisation.

And secondly, since the real is signifierised, and this is the second operation, we can say that it is caught up in certain laws. It is caught in a knowledge that presents itself in the form of laws, and this is what Lacan advances, this time starting directly from Jakobson: that there are laws of the signifier which impose themselves on the real.

And thus, I would add legalisation to elementisation. In other words, the transformation of the real into the signifier cannot make us forget that the signifier has its own laws and that this transformation is thereby imposed on the signifierised real.

These two operations will indeed allow Lacan to rejuvenate our reading of Freud, and in particular of what in Freud could figure as the raw real, namely the *id* which is thereby signifierised and defined in the following way: the *id*, in German *Es*, is of the signifier, says Lacan, which is already there in the real, some misunderstood signifier.

I will wait for a while before giving all its value to this misunderstanding of the signifier, but if I mention it at this point, it is to draw attention to the fact that as early as *Seminar IV*, Lacan's supposition is that there are some articulated signifiers, that is to say a knowledge, already there in the real.

In other words, the signifierisation of the real is, on the one hand, the raising of the real to the quality of the signifier, but it

is also the implication of the signifier in the real as being already there.



This amounts to refuting that there is some semblant there, since the signifier is assigned as already there in the real. Re-read this third chapter and you will see that I am not forcing my reading but that, on the basis of the second algorithm, I am underlining its edges.

What is henceforth presented to us is a real that obeys the laws of the signifier, and this brings out all the more the development that Lacan ties onto this construction: namely that there is no pre-established harmony between the sexes. One could say that this operation could have led us to believe the opposite. One could think, on the contrary, that the elementisation and the legalisation of the real would necessarily lead to posing a pre-established harmony between the sexes. Yet, this is where Lacan brings in experience in order to refute the constructions of the post-Freudians, and in particular of Jones, who merely pursued this operation blindly, without knowing it, thus posing that there is naturally, i.e. some signifierised real, an harmony between boy and girl. Lacan has to introduce, as a correction, that it would precisely be a mistake to start from the fact that between a girl and a boy there is the same relation as between a thread and a needle. He leans on Freud to formulate that in the child's development, there is nothing that shows that the 'tracks' which lead one sex to another already exist — in other words, that the 'tracks' of the sexual relation exist. Here I am obviously introducing a term which comes subsequently in Lacan's teaching.

Let us tighten this, be more specific. Lacan's starting point, his structuralist starting point, is, first of all, that there is some signifier in the real — and as I have already said, this is not entirely developed. His whole re-reading of the Freudian *id* rests on that. He says that the *id*, the source of the drives, is not some pure real, since there is already some signifier there. Some signifier, as he puts it, which is already installed and which functions, and which is represented at best by language. Further, the signifier does not come in an incoherent, disorderly form, but is structured according to the norms of a signifying articulation which marks all of the subject that can be presented as natural.

Of course there are what he calls the accidents of the body, which I represented with the King's hump or that of Casanova's belle, but they are taken up in the signifier, in other words they are signifierised and they give the subject their first weapons, as Lacan says. This is the evocation of what you will find developed in the *Écrits* as the coat of arms of the subject.

What Lacan presents as coats of arms are these accidents of individual histories, these contingencies of individual histories, these accidents of the body which, once taken up in the signifier, are endowed with a particular signification for the subject.

This is what is striking in Lacan's work, in what Lacan has brought forth, and in what his students, even those that separated from him, have continued to diffuse: primordial symbolisation, or that real elements are introduced in the signifying bonds themselves, and that they are thereby taken up in logical laws which they obey. These laws are at the same time primary and final because they are superimposed onto the real and at the same time they radically inform it. So this is what the structuralist viewpoint implied, which was Lacan's starting point: the signifier in the real.

But in a second moment, the signifierisation of the real should introduce an harmony, as in Lévi-Strauss for example, for when he studies his peoples, if I may, signifierisation un-

failingly introduces a system, a functioning, and, in the last analysis, an harmony.

This is where, paradoxically, one finds a discordance in the place of an harmony, as you will see when you return to pp. 48-49 of *Séminaire IV*.

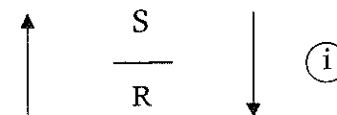
This is the index of what irresistibly modifies Lacan's structuralism: for this signifierisation is a signifierisation with a discordance, a signifierisation of the real but with a discordance. He introduces this paradoxical discordance by resorting to what Freud had introduced as the latency period, and which allows him to state: the primary object is the mother, this object is signifierised, it is thereby inscribed in a memory, a memory which is out of synch with the rest of the development, so that this signifierised object will return to parasite on the rest of the subject's development. In other words, the latency period is the reference which allows him to introduce a disharmony in what should be the harmony of the signifier and the real.

It is the latency period indeed, this reference which is exterior to the field of structuralism, which allows him to say that there is always a discordance between the re-found object and the sought-for object, which is the signifierised memory object of the mother. This also allows him to say that the object which is preserved in the signifier, transmitted by the signifier, will create a discordance in every later object-relation of the subject.

To adopt this perspective already amounts to introducing a kind of symbolic inertia which contravenes the chronological order of development. As such, this is the perspective from which Lacan approaches the fact that the signifier does not replicate the real but harbours an inertia which is its own.

What concept does Lacan have at the beginning, to account for it, to account for this discordance between the signifier and the real? In the end, the concept he has to account for it is the imaginary.

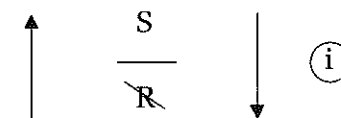
The imaginary is what should explain the falterings of signifierisation. This is how I decipher the sentence on p. 53 of *Seminar IV*: "In a dialectic which, first of all, essentially takes place between the symbolic and the real, the imaginary layer is introduced", says Lacan, and it is this dialectic which I reproduce by means of these arrows going in opposite directions.



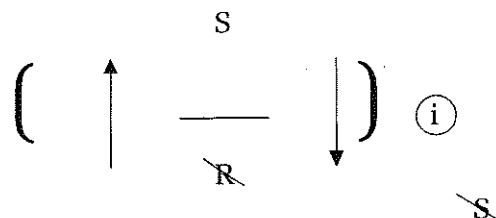
And what is this imaginary which Lacan explores in his *Seminar IV*? What is an imaginary organisation? It is: the effects of signifying inertia, which implies that in the end, the signifierisation of the real is never adequate to the real.

Lacan endeavoured to logicise, to summarise this process, or this dialectic, in his *Écrits, The Signification of the Phallus*. He called this dialectic an *Aufhebung* and justified his use of the term by speaking of the elevation of the real in so far as it can be signified, that is to say signifiable, to the function of the signifier.

And he noted that it supposed, each time, that a bar be placed on the real element.



From this, he even deduced the position of the phallus as signifier of this *Aufhebung*, supposing that it would itself disappear as signifier. In other words, he made the phallus into the signifier of this operation, but supposed the very signifier of the phallus to be barred as a consequence, so that when it is unveiled, the very demon of modesty should emerge.



This text on the signification of the phallus is meant to account logically for the process of signiflerisation. We can say that what Lacan called the phallus, and which marked the teaching of psychoanalysis, is, *par excellence*, the symbol of the fact that the semblant dominates the real.

Well, the second algorithm, the one which opposes the real to the semblant, introduces in this respect a reversal; and it thus requires us to make the effort of extracting ourselves from what is most certain in our training. In the last analysis, this reversal disengages the sense of the primacy of the phallus, and reveals that the phallus, the concept of the phallus, does nothing other than indicate a discordance between the symbolic and the real.

What does the primacy of the genital mean in Freud, this being the primacy the kernel of which Lacan uncovered in the primacy of the phallus? In Freud, it indicates, in Lacan's terms, that there is a lack of knowledge in the real, in other words, knowledge in the real does not programme access to the other sex. This is exactly what Lacan says as early as *Seminar IV*, except that at this point he attributes it to the latency period, that is to say to a fact of development, and we have to see how the very concept of development screened the concept of the real at stake, or the 'concept' of the real at stake.

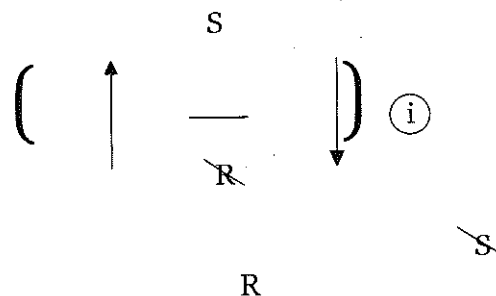
And already in *Seminar IV*, where he exposes the operation of signiflerisation, Lacan cannot avoid resorting to a factor which explains, in the last analysis, that the knowledge that there is in the real does not allow, facilitate or open access to the other sex.

Of all the reasons which Lacan may have given, I offer you this one, because it is the flower of *Seminar IV*, it retains all its seduction because it is a call to Freud, this resort to the latency period, the fact that the primary object is signiflerised and then begins to perturb the subject's object-relations, in other words that the shadow of the primary object continues to infect the relations which the subject may have.

But Lacan develops this precisely as a fact of structure, so what he develops is that there, there is a knowledge which does not programme access to the other sex. And this is thus what justifies Lacan, at the other extreme of his teaching, in developing this fault in the epistemological programme as such, and in developing it as such with a proposition which is inscribed in this very locus, in other words: sexuality makes a hole in the real.

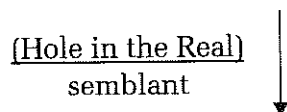
This means that concerning access to the other sex (as I translate it), there is no programme inscribed in the real. The proposition according to which sexuality makes a hole in the real is what radicalises what Lacan uncovers on the basis of the latency period, and it is the principle of a new universal proposition, such as, for example, if it fails in sexuality, it fails for each one of us. Or again, nobody has it easy, which implies a universal failure.

What Lacan presents in the course of his teaching as a certain amount of commonsensical observations he ends up coining a formula to designate, which is in fact a universal negative: 'there is no sexual relation', which designates, targets the real where there is no knowledge, in other words a real which resists signiflerisation, the signifying *Aufhebung*, and that the phallic *Aufhebung* leaves precisely to one side.



This is what I want to lay emphasis on here: the point at which it inscribes itself, the insemination point of this famous 'there is no sexual relation', is from the outset tied to an element as trivial as the resort to Freud's latency period.

It is in fact a radical reversal, which poses that the signifier-signified semblant inscribes itself where there is no knowledge in the real. If I want to complete my second algorithm, to define it more precisely, I would say that it is the hole in the real which determines what can then be inscribed as semblant.



It is really the absence of the sexual relation as formula which lacks as programme in the real, and this is the place from where the proliferation of signifier and signified is inscribed, and can be accounted for.

As simple as it may be, I will nonetheless draw your attention to the fact that these developments include a reversal of the paternal metaphor. The paternal metaphor supposes that the *jouissance* of the mother, inscribed as DM (but capital 'D') is dominated by the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father. In the perspective of the second algorithm, on the contrary, this paternal metaphor is reversed, and this is what allows Lacan to say, not perchance but logically, that the Name-of-the-Father is

nothing other than the name, amongst others, of the White Goddess. He refers to Robert Graves, it is the Mother Goddess of primordial religions, which predate the religions of the Name-of-the-Father. I do not know if he was right in saying that, I am a little responsible for it as it is me who gave him Robert Graves' book, called *White Goddess*. I gave it to him because I was slightly embarrassed by it, I gave it to him because it was a book that said the opposite of what he was saying. So at the time I did not think of anything better than to give him my book, and that's what he made of it. I gave it to him at the beginning of the holidays, and at the end of the holidays he had made of it that the Name-of-the-Father is but the name of the White Goddess, forever Other in its *jouissance*. And I take this to be an exact reversal of the paternal metaphor, one which allows us to see that the Name-of-the-Father is but a semblant which is incapable of mastering the real at stake, that the Name-of-the-Father is but a name assigned amongst others to a totally other *jouissance*.

This reversal, then, of which I said that it went so far as to challenge the radicality of the paternal metaphor and which indeed goes so far as to allow us to establish a perspective where neurosis and psychosis appear as diverse modalities of establishing semblants, in vain, to master the real, this reversal leads us to a downgrading of the field of language and the function of speech. This is what leads Lacan to pose that anything that makes sense is merely imaginary, that the very apparatus of the signifier and signified — this is how I translate it — is merely semblant in relation to the real. It also amounts to a downgrading of everything that is knowledge in relation to the real.

It is also a downgrading of the unconscious, and this is why Lacan, in his last teaching, proposes himself as offering a perspective beyond the unconscious, in so far as the unconscious always supposes a knowledge, is reducible to a knowledge. Let us say that the unconscious is linked to the signi-

fier/signified apparatus. Even the value which Freud gave to interpretation evidences this fact.

And this is what leads Lacan to say, in a sentence the perspectives of which are somewhat abyssal, that "what truly functions has nothing to do with what I name as real" — he says this in his *Séminaire XXIV, L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre*. This opposition between the functioning of, let's say a knowledge, an organised system of signifiers, is distinct from what it problematically designates of knowledge.

This means that it does not suppose this reference to the real, which remains a problematic — as well as a problematising — reference in Lacan. That is to say that it is the reference on the basis of which we can problematise everything that is of the order of the articulation of signifier to signified.

It may only have the status of a symptom, says Lacan, and even of one's own symptom in relation to signifier and signified. We see why it is a problematic reference: on the one hand, it is a kind of deduction made from the unconscious, it is the unconscious itself which appears as a response made to the real at the level of the semblant, a response to the hole in the real, a response which has to do with the vain effort to make the absence of sexual programming signify at the level of the real — it appears as a deduction made from the unconscious, and maybe even as an invention.

(Hole in the Real)
(semblant) the unconscious

So of course the real, posing the real, supposes the very relation of the signifier to the signified, and from time to time in his last years Lacan underlines the paradox that there is in even offering the notion of the real as an idea, since as soon as it is offered as notion, we can say that it is in and of itself caught up in the articulation and sliding of the relation of signifier to signified.

This is why I take seriously what Lacan formulates in his *Seminar*, namely, and I quote, that "it is not certain that what I say of the real is anything other than gobbledegook". This, it seems to me, designates the re-absorption of the notion of the real by the signifier/signified articulation.

(Signifier) ← (Hole in the Real)
(Signified) semblant (the unconscious)

This is what explains that Lacan only left the notion of the real subsist as watermark to his teaching, as an extreme position, it is a term which he uses once, and which allows us to read the very foundations of psychoanalysis in reverse.

Lacan does not offer the real as a fundamental concept of psychoanalysis. He proposes, as watermark, the signifier of the real as the obverse of the foundations of psychoanalysis. This is why he can present his endeavour as that of saying the true about knowledge, that is to say the true about the unconscious, and this is indeed what he set out to do at the beginning of his teaching: to say that the unconscious has to do with the articulation of signifier and signified. But he does not say that his endeavour is to say the true about the real and that he found himself facing this abyss of what can be said about the real without laying pretence to it being the true.

In fact he gave a version of this, by showing and demonstrating his borromean knot, in other words by trying to find another way than that of saying the true about the real, one which would involve evidencing the real and its articulations, which are distinct from those of signifier and signified.

It is in the same spirit that he could allow us a glimpse of the fact that everything that is being said is a scam. It was a teacher who said that, and so it is a limit statement which can only be inscribed in relation to the real. It means that everything

that can be said is of the semblant in relation to the real. Likewise, we see that to situate the unconscious in relation to the real is entirely different from situating it in relation to the Other.

To situate the unconscious in relation to the real amounts to saying that the unconscious is fundamentally a soliloquy, that the unconscious amounts to speaking alone in semblance as a defence against the real. It amounts to rendering psychoanalysis impossible, or, more exactly, to making psychoanalysis an exception. Lacan's last teaching is situated along this edge. Either psychoanalysis is impossible, that is to say that it merely exploits the relations between signifier and signified, which are merely semblance in relation to the real, or psychoanalysis is an exception, and the psychoanalyst is able to shift a subject's defence against the real. And to be an analysand is to consent to receive, from a psychoanalyst, what displaces one's defence.

What we have to explore this year, by means which, it must be said, leave us slightly breathless, is that the counterpart of the proposition 'the Other does not exist', on which I have previously commented with Eric Laurent, is balanced by the fact that there is the real. It is this real and the defence against this real that are at stake in psychoanalysis.

Lacan very clearly outlined the choice which presents itself to the subject, if the Other does not exist and if there is the real. He exposed the two fundamental positions that one can possibly take towards the real in the following terms: either it is madness, or it is mental debility. Well, it is between madness and mental debility that we will travel for the remainder of this year.

Translated by Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf

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