

# The Place of Men in The City of Women

Eric Laurent

I chose this title with the screenplay in mind of the film that Federico Fellini did not make. Having made *Juliette of the Spirits* which is about his wife's madness and the disarray of their relationship, he goes through a curious period, a special kind of despondency. Between *Juliette* and *Satyricon*, which is a curious return to ancient Rome and the dead, he becomes interested in making a movie based on *The Divine Comedy*, a journey into the beyond that, like Dante's, is marked by a female presence, a beyond over which the Virgin and her infant Jesus rule and in which the father is particularly absent. The encounter in the beyond with the mystery of the City of Women occurs following a plane crash that is experienced in a mortal dream as a soft landing in the square of a strange village that is dominated by an enormous Gothic cathedral like the one in Cologne. This is where Mastorna lands, in the City of Women... or in the city of the last judgement. That the beyond is ruled by *women* is not Dante's idea alone; it is taken up again in Philippe Sollers novel, *Women*, the first paragraph of which ends with this remark: "The world belongs to women. In other words, to death. But everyone lies about it."<sup>1</sup> In his travels Mastorna first encounters the young Jesus, an encounter with the divine child

that takes the form of a cabaret song. "An odalisque performs a belly dance that gradually turns into increasingly powerful, increasingly horrible convulsions. And then the odalisque gives birth to a baby."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the encounter with the Virgin is quite different from Dante's version. In Dante, the character of the Virgin is theologically quite complex: "Mother virgin, daughter of your son... fixed aim of the eternal plan."<sup>3</sup> Fellini does something completely different with the *mise en scène*: "On the stage, a magnificent woman approaches wearing a mink coat, brocade dress and diamonds: a profane Virgin."<sup>4</sup> In this city, which he enters in this way, Fellini describes the chaos of the dead that has nothing peaceful, nothing restful about it, and that is even more chaotic than the world of the living.

## Love in the time of algorithms

Both this vision and that of the Antiquity that he describes in *Satyricon* are descriptions of the world Fellini was living in in the '70s: the disarray [*désordre*] in love relations. The disarray in love relations and the disarray in *jouissance* appear at levels at which the clinical and the political levels meet, which is why it is not sufficient to speak about it from a purely

---

1 *Women*, trans. B. Bray (NY: Columbia, 1990)

2 FELLINI F., Dino Buzzati et Brunello Rondi, *Le Voyage de G. Mastorna*, Points, p. 180.

3 DANTE, *La Divine Comédie*, Paradis, Chant XXXIII, traduction Jacqueline Risset, Flammarion, 1990, p. 307

4 FELLINI F., Dino Buzzati et Brunello Rondi, *Le Voyage de G. Mastorna*, Points, p. 100.

sociological approach. We sense it in the worry that the sociologists of *jouissance* have when they attempt to address the phenomena in this field. I would call this worry “the anxiety of sociologists”. An article in the December [2018] issue of *The Atlantic*, “Why Are Young People Having So Little Sex?”, with the subtitle, “Despite the easing of taboos and the rise of hookup apps, Americans are in the midst of a sex recession”, illustrates the point.<sup>5</sup> The article interviews sociologists and psychologists, specialists in the study of sexual practices, who observe that a tendency towards sexual fatigue appears to be emerging. Despite, or because of, the creation of dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, Match, OkCupid, etc., the separation between the sexes is increasing and everyone would rather stay at home and masturbate to their favourite porn. Towards the end of the article, the author expresses her concern over the significant demographic decline that will ensue and the harmful consequences for the United States. One of the strengths of this article is that it brings up to date, in this era of apps and social networks, what Lacan observed regarding the relations between the sexes in the ‘60s, before smartphones and apps, at a time when there was only television and erotic shows or spectacles:

Invasive sexomania is nothing but a publicity phenomenon.... The fact that sex is on the agenda, on display everywhere and treated like some washing powder on a televised merry-go-round holds no promise of a benefit of any kind. I am not saying that this is bad. It is insufficient for the treatment of anxieties and particular problems. It is fashionable, it belongs to that dodge of liberalisation that we have been given by so-called permissive societies, as if it were a good granted us from on high.<sup>6</sup>

One finds the same phenomenon with apps.

A second symptom of this concern bears on the significance to attach to the consequences of the MeToo movement on the relation between the sexes a year and a half after it emerged as a global phenomenon. Shouldn't this movement of civilisation towards addressing [*maîtrise*] sexual violence

be compared with the at times violent regression to rightful attitudes of boastful machismo? A connected point is the correlation between the liberation movement for women to speak and the rise of populist leaders who are always advocating a desire to curb women and the rights of homosexuals, whether under the pretext of religion or of a return to traditional ways. This is true of all populist leaders such as Putin, Erdogan, Xi Jinping, Duterte, and, in Europe, Viktor Orban in Hungary and Kaczynski in Poland. In the USA, the duo of the buffoon Trump and the ultra-serious Vice-President Mike Pence aim at nothing less than to repeal the right to an abortion. A law passed recently in Alabama is a move in the direction of restrictions never seen before. It all stresses the value of the “traditional” family and the threat of disarray in love relations. In every one of these symptoms one can detect progression and regression, actions and reactions that are a clear indication of a disarray that cannot be easily organised in the form of some fictional progress embodied in history as knowledge relating to the things of sex and *jouissance*. The politics of sexualisation is not to be thought of as organised in a progressive manner, but as a struggle [*conquête*] for equal rights.

### **The rock of castration or the flight of sexual meaning**

The anxiety of governors, of a master signifier, in the face of the disorders in love relations is very Lacanian. If there is something that is specific to this orientation in psychoanalysis, it is the following, formulated by Lacan: “The real, for the speaking being, is that one is lost in the sexual relation”.<sup>7</sup> What, for Freud, was extremely solid, to the point of calling it the rock of castration, for Lacan becomes a point that is ungraspable, a loss, something that can never be encountered. The fact that the subject is lost in the sexual relation can be compared with one of Lacan's best known aphorisms, “Woman does not exist”.<sup>8</sup> What exists, what has a logical existence, are women, one by one. For Freud, what was solid in the analytic experience was the male libido, phallic *jouissance*, whereas on the side of women the ungraspable, the “What does a woman want?”, remained a question for him. We know this formulation, which he used

5 JULIAN K., « Why are young people having so little sex ? », *The Atlantic*, December 2018 issue, available in the Internet.

6 LACAN J., « Entretien avec Emilio Granzotto pour le journal *Panorama*, avril 1974 » *La Cause du désir*, n°88, 2014, p. 165-173.

7 LACAN J., « Le jouir de l'être parlant s'articule », *La Cause du désir*, n°101, 2019, p. 12.

8 LACAN J., *Le Séminaire*, livre XVIII, *D'un Discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, texte établi par J.-A. Miller, Paris, Seuil, 2006, p. 74.

with Marie Bonaparte in the 1930s, “What does a woman want? It has always been a mystery to me.”<sup>9</sup> Phallic jouissance obviously has a solid aspect. Pornography evolved in seeking to industrialise the relation between a scenario and phallic jouissance. Heaps of algorithms calculate the perfect hashtag that will maximise the clicks on a heading.

On the side of women, effectively, no one really knows how they enjoy, how to systematise it. The projects for pornography for women have all failed. A difficulty in defining the possibility, as Lacan says, of a female perversion of the thing has not been clinically established. On the contrary, Lacan undertook to transform what Freud established with his concept of the phallus by not only writing this phallus as articulated to  $-\phi$ , to castration, but also by writing that there is a point, a  $\Phi$ , that does not correspond to castration and which is on both the masculine and the feminine side. There is something in jouissance that does not suffer the humiliation [*passer par les fourches caudines*] of castration, that remains and enables another jouissance to emerge alongside what is masculine jouissance properly so-called, a form of jouissance that refuses to be negativized and which is precisely on both the feminine and the masculine sides. Women, one by one, because they are unencumbered by this organ, have the capacity to incarnate this jouissance beyond the phallus. As Jacques-Alain Miller put it humorously, “Women don’t have the anxiety of the owner of property”<sup>10</sup>, they are therefore more at ease with embodying this beyond, this surplus pleasure that cannot pass without castration. How have women come to embody the locus of supplementary jouissance in different civilisations? Which, even in our time of globalisation, still varies from civilisation to civilisation. This morning, you heard what Mohammed Ennaji had to say about the relation between a woman’s body and Islam, testifying to the elaboration on the ways in which a woman is the symptom of a very particular discourse and civilisation.<sup>11</sup> Fetishization of merchandise governs our global civilisation, in which an adapted form of capitalism is everywhere, whether it be the Chinese,

North-American or European version, even if they are different versions. This fetishism may be universal; smartphones are objects of desire the world over. But in different versions, the elaboration of the woman symptom varies according to the regime, a real point of jouissance as an echo of global capitalism.

### ***The woman symptom and the politics of forms of jouissance***

This jouissance beyond [the phallus] is not only embodied in the position of women, but it is also distributed within what may be called “communities of jouissance”, in which each one explicitly explores the relationship between phallic jouissance and jouissance beyond. LGBT communities construct an autonomous discourse-space for themselves, one in which the exploration of the disarray of forms of jouissance that invade bodies and exile them, creates a social link between their members. The social link is no longer located at the level of a common ideal, but at that of a common exploration of that which, in non-negatable jouissance, cannot be inscribed or reduced.

Equal rights between men and women, whatever their sexual orientation, or disorientation, and the collapse of the male chauvinist system have given rise to new terrors and have brought into the light of day re-awakened male castration anxieties. The figure of the chauvinistic man of jouissance, à la Trump, is a sort of caricature of limitless jouissance, a mimicking of the no-limits feminine jouissance, like that of the drug addict who through unlimited drug use, wants to avoid a phallic coming down.

What is at stake in the relation between phallic jouissance and jouissance beyond the phallus is figuring out how it is that however equal their rights, a woman always remains radically other for a man. It is here that she can be [his] symptom rather than [his] infernal, deadly superego. Jouissance in the city of women, in which the men have their place, according to Lacan, is not at all hedonistic. It separates into what is the jouissance beyond the phallic limit, the one that is beyond castration, and the unlimited that becomes

9 LACAN J., *Le Séminaire*, Livre VII, Paris, Le Seuil, 1986, p. 18. [See E. Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*, vol. 2, p. 468 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1974): “The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is ‘What does a woman want?’” – *translator*.]

10 Jacques Alain Miller, des semblants dans la relation entre les sexes, *La Cause freudienne* n° 36.

11 É. Laurent is referring to the historian, sociologist and economist, Mohammed Ennaji, guest at the *Semaine Lacan* in Nantes, where he spoke about his book, *Le Corps enchaîné. Comment l’Islam contrôle la femme* [*The Body in Chains : How Islam Controls Women*] (Non Lieu, 2019).

civilised through its inscription in the feminine side of sexuation. There is no coding for that, whatever form of the One is countenanced.

The decline of ideologies, of grand narratives, or of what constituted the common good in the form of a shared Ideal, has disclosed a competition between multiple forms of jouissance that are unable to be resolved into a unity. Nevertheless, the absence of a common grand narrative, which defines our epoch, has another consequence. All narratives are replaced by a single exigency, the exigency of science. The rule of being “evidence-based” in all things now extends its powers beyond the strict domain of science. Everything is quantified, in the false sciences that management typifies perfectly. In universally quantifying, humanism itself, which is the very notion of the universal, appears to depend strictly on the universalisation of science. On this question I refer to Jacques-Alain Miller’s 1985 *Course* of which an extract has been recently published in the journal *Mental*. He transcribes a presentation at the association SOS Racisme. He exposes the paradox whereby the humanism of our time, the universal of man, is no longer sustained by a body of values or culture, but by a single support, the subject of science.

It is a fact that universal humanism is not sustainable.... [Anyone] who has no other support than the discourse of science – the right to knowledge and contribution to knowledge. Universal humanism is a logical absurdity that amounts to wishing that the Other be the same.... Now, the Other has a unique propensity to manifest itself as not the same.... This disorients progressivism, based as it is on the progress of the discourse of science as universal to arrive at standardisation.<sup>12</sup>

This is the great hope of a Victor Hugo to save humanity from misery through science. Jacques-Alain Miller describes a double movement in science:

To be sure, science is profoundly disaggregative.... The technological consequences of science are disaggregative because the

discourse of science employs a very pure form of the subject, a universalised mode of the subject. The discourse of science is made for and by each and every one of us who thinks, “I am thinking, therefore I am”.<sup>13</sup>

It suffices to articulate the *I*, this being, with “I am thinking, therefore I am” for everything else, beliefs and the rest, to be cancelled out. It is sufficient to be that [this *I*] to be able to access knowledge qua universal knowledge. This way lies liberation, disaggregation, but [also] the cancelling out of particularities, [and] therefore uniformization.

This is why Lacan’s declaration was surprising when in the same years of the 1970s he said, “Our future as common markets will be balanced by an increasingly hard-line extension of the process of segregation.”<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, we have the expansion of the common market, which is a space – an example even – of calculating, of counting, in Europe where the market is a common market, the great market which has its common currency that facilitates calculation, the expansion of a common calculation. The expansion of procedures to the point of being completely globalised. But on the other hand, calculating also accentuates whatever is going to resist inclusion. Globalisation produces the revolt of those whom it has cast aside. For sure, they are the economic outcasts, such as in France the gilets jaunes who have produced a rethink on this point. There are myriad others. Those who resist the universal as such, without any particularity. In Europe this may be nations such as Ireland, Catalonia, Scotland, which are nations within complex States, and in which the movements of revolt or struggles for independence are not necessarily tied to economic hardship. It can sometimes be the opposite, they may be very rich; Catalonia wants to get its money back by ridding itself of Andalusia.

This is also the European history of colonisation, which has come back like a boomerang to divide the various peoples emerging from colonisation and who find themselves at the very heart of these same common markets. In the Americas, North and South, the indigenous peoples from Terra del Fuego to Alaska, from the Mapuche to the Inuit, demand recognition for

12 Jacques-Alain Miller, “Les causes obscures du racism”, *Mental, Revue internationale de psychanalyse*, no. 38, November 2018, p. 143.

13 “Les causes obscures”, 145.

14 Jacques Lacan, “Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School”, trans R. Grigg, p. 12. Available here: [lacancircle.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Proposition\\_of\\_9\\_October.pdf](http://lacancircle.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Proposition_of_9_October.pdf)

their culture and for rights that cannot be absorbed into the common market. The social utopias of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, building on the Industrial Revolution, dreamed of absorbing all these particularities into a uniform “process of production”. The demand for distinctive ways of enjoyment is not the same for mass phenomena as for a protest at the subjective level, but from the viewpoint of the logic of jouissance, the particular and the universal come together.

These revolts regarding jouissance do not cease demonstrating that the various forms of scientific knowledge, which claim to treat every kind of addictions, from the most sublimated (the distinctive features of their culture) to the most toxic (distinct substances), fail to merge into the universal.

The subject of psychoanalysis, inherited from the universal subject of science, is a subject that has separated itself from the inherited wisdom of tradition. As a reaction, this subject of which psychoanalysis speaks, which is also the subject of the civilisation of science, attempts to recreate, by way of New Age superstitions, a sort of neo-tradition, as in the Burning Man festivals in California in which contemporaneity proposes to make a spectacle out of the treatment of every type of jouissance in a kind of parade of technological pride. Yet, it seems that the types of jouissance remain distinct, even in the sects that want to bring them together or juxtapose them in a synthesising Other. The different types of jouissance fail to recognise one another and remain separate from one another. There is no end to the questions regarding the unequal distribution of jouissance and how it is not calculable like the distribution of economic inequality. “When the Other gets a little too close, new fantasies tend towards the surfeit of jouissance in the Other.”<sup>15</sup>

On the one hand, there is, beyond the narcissism of minor differences, a hatred of the Other enjoyment when he gets too close. But it is not a distance measured in metres. The subject who gets too close to the Other enjoyment finds it in himself, separated from himself as subject. This is what makes for the insoluble character of the question of the subject's relation to his jouissance. “If the problem has the appearance of being insoluble, it's because the Other is Other within me. The root of racism is the hatred of one's own jouissance.... If the Other is in a position of

extimacy within me, it's also my own hatred.”<sup>16</sup>

This logic of a non-negativizable jouissance, tied to the part object, beyond the phallic question, made it possible for Lacan to introduce a twist to Freud's *Massenpsychologie* [*Group Psychology*], linked to the father. Lacan formulates the social bond on the basis of this impossible rejection of an initial jouissance.

Malicious [*mauvaise*] jouissance, in operation in racist discourse, is a misrecognition of this logic. The founding crime, for Lacan, is not the murder of the father, but the will to murder him who embodies the jouissance I reject. We can say that in this respect Lacan is closer to Bataille than to Freud. For Bataille, the primordial murder that founds society is not the murder of the father, but the murder of a woman. Consequently, in Bataille's dreams there were secret communities dreaming of acting on it. We have seen that there are such communities, as was shown by the murder of Sharon Tate in the 1970s; an idea that can easily occur to a number of people when they lose the plot.

### **Beyond the phallus, the partner-symptom**

Where do we locate the trans question in the opposition between phallic jouissance and the Other beyond, its Other? Is this a jouissance that is supplementary to the two sides of man / woman sexualisation? Is this a third form of sexualisation? It's a question we can ask with reference to a work of fiction, a TV series by the ex-brothers Wachowski, who encountered success with their [movie] *Matrix*. No one foresaw that the making of *Matrix* would result in the transitioning of the two brothers, who together undertook male-to-female transition at one and the same time to become the Wachowski sisters. They subsequently produced and directed a remarkable TV series that gives *Matrix* a new form. Gérard Wacjman gives a very clear account of this in his recent book on the series: “A striking example, semi paradigmatic, is *Sense8*, the fine series by Lana and Lilly Wachowski and Joseph Michael Straczynski. Eight people who are spread over the four corners of the globe, with no relationship between them a priori, all find themselves, through a mysterious connection, linked to one another, each to all and all to each, at each and every moment sharing all they know and all their capabilities to the point where they instantly, magically find themselves

15 J.-A. Miller, “Les causes obscures du racisme”, 149.

16 “Les causes obscures du racisme”, 149.

together exactly where they must, when they must, whether it occurs through need, desire or love.”<sup>17</sup>

The matrix becomes a supplementary organ that binds the eight people to one another and supposedly enables a transparency to and a perfect equivalence [*adéquation*] with the symptom-as-partner – an absence of limits, a real bond far exceeding telepathy, since it is not a matter of signifiers but of jouissance. This supplementary organ is the basis of the trans hope. The recent testimonies that are available about these experiences of transitioning, which now form a literary genre of their own, bear the trace of the uniqueness of this experience. The basic idea is not at all that of passing from man to woman or from woman to man; it is a continuous, endless process. More than attaining a given identity, it is an identity insofar as it remains unattainable. Lacan notes in his *Seminar... or Worse*, 8 December 1971, that what defines the trans position is to take the organ for the signifier [phallus] and thus to reach the organ.<sup>18</sup> The work of a trans person is to bring into existence the organ necessary for making jouissance an object of discourse.

### ***Beyond the phallus and semblants***

This organ that wants to be invented by trans jouissance is an opening onto the diverse modalities of the way in which this beyond-the-phallus is embodied, is made real in the different communities of jouissance across civilisations. The paths taken by these diverse modalities go from the problematic of the phallus to its generalisation in what Lacan called semblants. The semblant as a category declassifies, generalises, subverts the Freudian phallus. There where Freud discerned one libido only and made the phallus its matching organ, Lacan in the 1970s, on the contrary, turned phallic jouissance into an obstacle. J.-L. Gault quoted the following remarks: “The phallus is the conscientious objection made by one of the two sexed beings to the service to be rendered to the other.”<sup>19</sup> Lacan will frequently play upon this harmony [*harmonique*], to the point of stating that what a man

is most inconvenienced [*embarrassé*] by is a woman’s body since he cannot enjoy [*jouit*] it. There is another jouissance that contrasts with this autoeroticism of the organ, one that is linked to language, and thus to semblants. It is not complementary to phallic jouissance, but supplementary to it. This jouissance of the body, beyond the phallus, is paradoxically the one that is articulated with language the most, via semblants. In Lacan’s first teaching, the Freudian phallus is situated as “the signifier that gives a name to the libido”. What was important for Lacan at that time was to extract psychoanalysts from the naturalism that they were bogged down in, the idea that libido was a sort of vital energy. To say, “That’s how you write it, it is a particular logic”, was the initial point. It had an effect to say, “The phallus is a signifier. ... [I]t is the signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole”.<sup>20</sup> The signified effects, that is, of sexual meaning. It is important to state that the sexual sense is logical, that it is distributed by means of an operator, which is the phallus, and that one can thereby extract oneself from the mirages of a vital economy that is already there. But whereas he was saying this about the phallus, from *Seminar XVII, D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* [*Of a discourse that is not a semblant*], Lacan makes the semblant “the signifier itself insofar as it is captured in a discourse”.<sup>21</sup> Discourse becomes an apparatus of semblants.<sup>22</sup> This makes it possible for him to turn the semblant into a sort of generalisation more powerful than the question of the phallus, more powerful since semblants are able to regulate both phallic jouissance and its beyond.

In his text, J.-L. Gault notes the use Lacan makes of this category to put on its feet the observations of Roland Barthes, who was enchanted by Japanese rituals present in all aspects of social life and who had just published *Empire of Signs*.<sup>23</sup> In mentioning this book, Lacan distances himself from Barthes’ enthusiasm [*euphorie*]: “The inebriated feeling that in all his manners the Japanese subject envelops nothing. The empire of signs, he entitles his essay, meaning:

17 G. Wacjman, *Les séries, le monde, la crise, les femmes*, Verdier, 2018, p. 29.

18 See... or Worse, 8.

19 *Seminar XX*, p. 7.

20 *Écrits*, 579 in the English edition

21 LACAN J., *Le Séminaire, livre XVIII, D’un Discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, *op. cit.*

22 *Ibid*, 9 juin 1971.

23 *Empire of Signs*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

empire of semblances.”<sup>24</sup> The remark that is often left out, but not by J.-L. Gault, is that the Japanese subject is not so enthusiastic about it: “I am told that the Japanese man think it’s bad.”<sup>25</sup> Lacan says “Japanese man” not “Japanese woman” – it’s here that one undoubtedly finds the gap and the particularity of Japanese eroticism to which the 1976 film by Nagisa Oshima, called *In the Realm of the Senses* in English (*Ai no corrida: corrida of love*), bears witness. The man dies at the end and she cuts off his cock. If Oshima takes eroticism to the limit, nevertheless, erotic prints and manga clearly demonstrate the Japanese taste for bondage and SM practices in general, and that’s without evoking as testimony the work of Mishima on the side of homosexuality. On the one hand, the realm of semblants; on the other, the realm of bonds. One comes away with the idea that the Japanese woman is forever escaping from the Japanese man and remains unreachable despite the bonds with which he would like to fasten her.

### **Beyond the phallus, the partner-symptom**

One basic consequence of the distinction at the level of the couple between the two jouissances, beyond phallic libido, means that, as J.-A. Miller remarks, the relation that cannot be established, which cannot be written, occurs at the level of jouissance: “At the level of the unconscious relation to jouissance, there is sexuation; and at the level of sexuation, that makes two. Two modes of jouissance.”<sup>26</sup> And this is where the need for the theory of the symptom as the partner of jouissance comes in. *L’Os d’une cure*, is a timely publication for situating the proper mode of un-limitation of jouissance on the feminine side and the consequences that follow. “Unable to base itself on a symbolic [*signifiant*] relation, the couple base themselves on a relation at the level of jouissance.”<sup>27</sup> But jouissance is always articulated with the body in a specific way, one that makes it possible to distinguish between jouissance of the body and jouissance outside the body. This outside-the-body

jouissance has a specific topology in each of the sexes: “Jouissance is produced in the body of the One by means of the body of the Other.”<sup>28</sup>

In Lacan’s conception, this jouissance is always autoerotic and alloerotic, since it includes the other. The system of production on the man’s *and* the woman’s side is not the same. On the man’s side, autoerotic phallic jouissance is produced outside the body, with the exception of the phallus on the man’s body. On the other side, the distinct localisation of feminine jouissance is represented in the function of the not-all. The locus of jouissance is not a point of exception; it is produced in the body of the woman, except that this body does not form a unity, does not form a whole. This is the delocalisation of feminine jouissance which manifests itself in multiple ways. It is manifest that in jouissance, the woman’s body is itself “othered”, as J.-A. Miller says. Lacan expresses this by saying that woman is “Other to herself.”<sup>29</sup>

There is not only the dissymmetry in the production of jouissance in the body as distinct from that of the organ, there are [also] the different roles played by the demand for love, the words of love, or indeed the love letter. These registers need to be differentiated: “The demand for love that plays, in feminine sexuality, a role without equivalent on the masculine side – this demand for love has something absolute about it.”<sup>30</sup>

When Lacan says in *Encore*, “What makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love”,<sup>31</sup> as being what women accentuate and to which they have privileged access, it is nevertheless not a recipe for attaining happiness. “The demand for love, in its potentially infinite character, returns to the feminine speaking being [*parlêtre*] in a devastating [*ravage*] form.... This devastation is the other side of love.... This devastation is the return of the demand for love, in the same way as a symptom is.”<sup>32</sup> This differentiates it from the symptom on the masculine side, which is clinical, localised, elementary, countable and classifiable. As a consequence, “in the relations between a couple, the woman is driven to fetishize herself, to

24 “Lituraterre”, trans. D. Nobus, *Continental Philosophy Review* (2013) 46: 334.

25 P. 334. Translation modified

26 MILLER J.-A., « Les causes obscures du racisme », *op.cit.*, p. 150

27 MILLER J.-A., *L’Os d’une cure*, Navarin Éditeur, Paris, 2018, p. 71.

28 *L’Os d’une cure*, p. 74.

29 “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality”, *Écrits*, 616.

30 *L’Os d’une cure*, 79.

31 *Encore*, 45.

32 *L’Os*, 83.

symptomatize herself and also to veil herself, mask herself and accentuate her semblants.”<sup>33</sup> And on that, Western and Eastern countries have chosen, in the East, the use of the veil and in the West, on the contrary, the use of unveiling, but with the accentuation of every kind of fetishism. These are two ways that end up at the same place, the accentuation of semblants. As a consequence, women find it difficult to express it; they do not know quite what to say about this jouissance. And as a result, a man knows much more about his own jouissance than a woman does about hers. This is what is called male perversion.

In the City of women, men find themselves in the place of having to decipher the enigma that confronts women and men who love the jouissance of women in their radical otherness as well as their semblants, beyond the phallus. It is not a matter of “thinking that one is a man or a woman, but of taking account of the fact that there are women for the boy, [and of the fact that] there are men for the girl.”<sup>34</sup> This is all that it means to traverse phallic identifications, and it is what renders a world liveable.

***Translation by Russell Grigg***

---

33 *L'Os*, 87.

34 LACAN J., *Le Séminaire*, Livre XVIII, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, op. cit., p. 34.