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World

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Introduction

Psychoanalysis in the World

Russell Grigg

We publish here three articles on psychoanalysts' interventions on psychoanalysis in the world. Frank Rollier discusses his work, introducing a series of valuable vignettes to illustrate his remarks, at the Centre Psychanalytique de Consultation et de Traitement, or CPCT, in his hometown of Antibes. It emerges from Rollier's analysis that there is no question of working with young people without deep reflection on the social circumstances faced by today's youth. This article is paired with Rollier's discussion of the role and place of diagnosis in contemporary psychoanalysis. Peichi Su, in a completely different context, gives a fine analysis, via an account of her work with a young adult man in the setting of a mental health centre in Buenos Aires, of the question of subjective choice. Rik Loose's contribution addresses two aspects of the modern technological world's exploitation of desire: the omnipresent *objets a* of modern life that act as condensers

of jouissance, and the not unrelated phenomenon of the world as fast becoming a world of waste, as the junkyard of abandoned objects.

Two articles follow that draw on psychoanalysis and literature. A fine article by Mladen Dolar analyses the liminal region between waking and sleeping states, referring to the dream of the burning child analysed by Lacan in *Seminar XI* which he so brilliantly links to moments where this region is at work in Kafka, Racine and Proust. And, last but not least, there is Santanu Biswas's fine contribution on a work by Rabindranath Tagore in which Biswas's subtle Lacanian analysis of the work reveals, among other things, the intertwining of mother with motherland.

This issue of the journal concludes with a poem by Sarah Rice, a Canberra-based poet and philosopher. The poem, "Speaking Bluntly", is from her collection *Fingertip of the Tongue* published by University of Western Australia Press.

Diagnosis in contemporary psychoanalysis

The crisis of authority and the contemporary discontent of civilization¹

Frank Rollier

I will talk about this question mainly from my practice of applied psychoanalysis in a Centre Psychanalytique de Consultations et de Traitement (CPCT) for adolescents and parents. It is a free care centre in which the analytic discourse prevails. I am one of the people in charge. A CPCT offers a short and free treatment and is a privileged observatory of the discontents in civilization.

The new forms of social ties and relationship to authority generate in teens a discontent characteristic of our time.

Although Freud wrote extensively of parental authority and of the authority of the superego in *Civilization and its Discontents*, authority is not a psychoanalytic concept. It is a two-sided signifier which comes to us from the Latin *auctoritas* and which has two seemingly contradictory meanings.² The first refers to a prohibition; it is the authority which constrains, the power to make oneself obeyed, which we often associate with authoritarianism, even tyranny—and it is this meaning that Freud refers to. The other meaning is on the side of authorization; it is then a question of allowing, of authorizing, that is to say of becoming an author. In Latin, the author (*auctor*) is the instigator, the one who pushes to act,

the one who allows (one) to grow. Taken in this second meaning, then, authority cannot be reduced to what is prohibited. I have divided my presentation into four parts.

1. The decline of the fathers' authority and the discrediting of all forms of authority

All representations of authority are discredited today – education, justice, police, medicine, politics – and are held in contempt to the point that our time appears as that of ‘the Other who does not exist’.³

The ‘crisis of authority’ is not new. Four centuries before our era, Plato wondered about the decadence of Athens and the decline of authority, which at that time rested on the tradition represented by the elders and by the father. The following sentence is attributed to him:

When fathers get used to let the children do what they want,
When the sons no longer heed their words,
When the Masters tremble in front of the students and prefer to flatter them,
When young people finally despise the laws because they no longer see above them the

1 Presented at the Lacan Circle of Australia, May 7th, 2024

2 E. Laurent, ‘Quelles autorités pour quelles punitions?’, *Élucidation*, no. 2, in *Élucidations*, nos. 0 à 7 (Paris: Verdier, 2003), 26.

3 Cf. J.-A. Miller & E. Laurent, *L'orientation lacanienne, L'Autre qui n'existe pas et ses comités d'éthique*, J.-A. Miller's course in the Department of Psychoanalysis, University of Paris VIII, 1996-1997, unpublished.

authority of anything or anyone, then, in all youth and beauty, it is the beginning of tyranny.⁴

International news confirms that the crisis of authority can feed into authoritarian powers. We see in fact that the denunciation by a political leader of the supposed ‘decadence’ of values which would lead to ‘the destruction of families’ can consolidate a dictatorship or, to follow Lacan’s formula in *Television*, bring about a shift ‘from the father to the worst’.⁵

In our civilisation, the decline of the father and what Hannah Arendt did not hesitate to call in 1958 the disappearance of authority are contemporaneous with the end of the Roman Empire.⁶ Arendt notes that in Rome, the authority of the living perpetuated that of the ancestors, based on an immutable tradition, which was subsequently called into question by Christianity. Indeed, Christianity promised a possible redemption of sins, instead of the eternal punishment of the guilty—as well as the hope of another life.⁷

At the beginning of the 19th century, when capitalism was taking off, Balzac wrote that ‘there is no question of laws now, their place has been taken by custom’.⁸ This is one way of expressing the proposition that the promotion of *jouissance* was already affecting father figures who once brought knowledge and uttered the Law. As early as 1938, Lacan noted that, ‘whereas the role of the imago of the father can be grasped in a striking way in the formation of most great men’, we are witnessing its ‘social decline’—a decline that ‘constitutes a psychological crisis’. Suggesting that ‘It may even be that the emergence of psychoanalysis itself is linked to this very crisis’, he postulates that ‘the forms of neurosis dominating the end of the last century’ were ‘intimately linked with the conditions of the family’.⁹ He then adds, ‘Our experience leads us to designate the principal determinant (of the majority of neuroses) in the personality of the father, which is always lacking in

one way or another, whether he be absent or humiliated, divided or a sham’.¹⁰

In 1950, Lacan spoke of ‘a civilization whose ideals are ever more utilitarian’¹¹ and Hannah Arendt notes at the same time that ‘breakdown of all traditional authorities ... has spread to such pre-political areas as child-rearing and education, where authority in the widest sense has always been accepted as a natural necessity’.¹²

2. The authority of fathers and parents today

In the third of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) on ‘The transformations of puberty’ Freud discusses the pubescent child’s effort at ‘detachment from parental authority’.¹³ More than a century later, most adolescents are no longer subject to the ‘paternal authority’ of which Freud spoke. Today, the father is questioned from all sides, at best summoned to earn his spurs, at worst rejected entirely. For J.-A. Miller, the tradition of parental authority ‘has been fractured ... by the combination of the two discourses of science and of capitalism’.¹⁴

As our colleague Laure Naveau has noted, the psychic relations that once defined the family are changing, the Oedipus Complex is far less prevalent in young people today.¹⁵

Today, fathers themselves and the ideals they hold are no longer available to give direction to the adolescent who finds himself without symbolic reference points and without a compass that could serve as an authority for him. He is then at the mercy of loneliness and the agonizing questions of what to do with his body, with his fellow men and with his very existence.

In fact, a father who functions as such—I mean as *Name-of-the-Father*—who is able to bear both prohibition and desire and is capable of being an authority is often lacking. An acute case can be seen in situations of medically assisted procreation

4 Passage said to have been published in the newspaper *La République*, but it seems to be apocryphal.

5 J. Lacan, *Television* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 46. Translation modified.

6 See H. Arendt, ‘[What Is Authority?](#)’ (1958).

7 Arendt, ‘What Is Authority?’, see Part V.

8 H. de Balzac, *Lost Illusions* (Philadelphia: Gebby, 1898), 341.

9 J. Lacan, ‘Les Complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu’, *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 61.

10 Lacan, ‘Complexes’, 61.

11 J. Lacan, ‘A Theoretical Introduction to the Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology’, *Écrits* (New York: Norton, 2006), 112.

12 Arendt, ‘Authority’, 1.

13 S. Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, vol. 7, Standard Edition (London: Hogarth, 1953), 227.

14 J.-A. Miller, ‘[Presentation of the Theme of the IX Congress of the WAP](#)’.

15 L. Naveau, ‘[Quelle autorité aujourd’hui pour les enfants et les adolescents?](#)’.

(MAP) where, as Dominique Laurent writes, ‘everything can be done in silence between the surrogate mother and the subjects who claim rights regarding the child’.¹⁶ This failure of a paternal function to limit jouissance pushes the adolescent to enjoy more and more, promoting the immediate expression of drives: transgressions, risky behaviours, aggressive or suicidal acts that avoid passing through speech addressed to an Other. The absence of authority, therefore, can have a deadly [*mortifère*] dimension. Speech being thus devalued, its power to alleviate is misunderstood.

Teenagers frequently refuse authority from an adult, be it a parent, a teacher, an educator, or from any Other who might serve as a point of reference. This symbolic deficiency leaves the field open to the imaginary, which can then occupy the entire mental space.

The adolescent who questions the authority of the parent may unconsciously seek an alternative, authentic authority, as in the case of the following vignette from my clinical psychoanalytic work at a centre working with parents and adolescents.

Vignette

‘There’s only the two of us,’ says this divorced mother who came to talk about her relationship with her 13-year-old son who, she says, is ‘in full puberty’. Fabian, who refuses to attend, does not respect her authority. He tells her that she is ‘a suffocating mother’; he responds with insults and blows to the slaps of his mother who claims to be severe and will not let ‘anything pass’. ‘It’s a titanic struggle,’ she says. The sessions with this mother will finally lead her to appeal to his father, until then totally absent from the family scene which had been reduced to the mother-son couple, and whose intervention Fabian had done everything to provoke.

Fabian’s parents say they are overwhelmed; they struggle to find an Other to whom they could have recourse as an authority on whom they could rely.

They do not know how to manage the too-much-jouissance that invades the teenager; they oscillate between tolerance, giving in to the temptation to punish, and resignation. The parents find themselves drawn back into their respective solitude and into the singularity of their subjective position.

Hélène Deutsch, an analysand of Freud’s based in the United States, had already observed that many parents deal with the critical period of adolescence by identifying with their adolescent—‘especially the mothers,’ she wrote, ‘who experience a violent desire to be modern’. These parents, she detailed, ‘renounce their authority and even go so far as to cooperate with their children in their activities of revolt’.¹⁷ Today, this tendency has increased, in my view, giving rise to a new kind of authoritarianism that one can also identify, at least in France, in the policies of the State that encourage what it calls ‘good practices’ of care, which are in fact practices over which it has control.

There is, says Jacques-Alain Miller, ‘coming from society, the desire to tyrannize the adolescent in crisis and to establish a brutal authority over him’.¹⁸

Vignette

*A father comes to talk about his position in relation to his 16-year-old son who, he says, ‘always wants to do whatever he wants’, especially going out at all hours. So, this father decided to lock up his son’s scooter to prevent him from using it. In response, his son cut through the chain. The aggressive act of the father, therefore, triggered a mirrored aggressiveness from the son.’¹⁹ After three sessions, this father decided to no longer force his son to stay at home, wanting instead to be what he calls ‘an amiable, friendly father’ [*un père à l’aimable*] who talks with his son.*

As Laure Naveau rightly pointed out (at the Pont Freudien), ‘The question of authority ... raises the question of speech and of respect for speech at the level of the parents.’

The sessions with this father therefore enabled a passage from act to speech, from authoritarianism

16 Cf. D. Laurent, ‘Parentalité et désir d’enfant à l’heure des PMA [Procréation Médicale Assistée]’, *La Lettre mensuelle*, journal of the Association de la Cause Freudienne and the Centre Psychanalytique de Consultation et de Traitement, no. 259 (2007).

17 H. Deutsch H, *Selected Problems of Adolescence* (Madison CT: International Universities Press, 1970).

18 J.-A. Miller, ‘En direction de l’adolescence’, third study day of the l’Institut de l’Enfant.

19 As Hannah Arendt writes, ‘Authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed!’ ‘Authority’, 2.

towards what Éric Laurent called a ‘contractual, negotiated, responsible paternity ... reduced to the instrument’. This, says Laurent, is ‘a new version of the humiliation of the father’.²⁰ Laurent adds that ‘the more the father of reality is absent from his function, the more the call to the father in heaven insists’.²¹

Vignette

A young man explains that, when he is in the presence of ‘a religious friend who leads a healthy life’, he is fascinated by the ideals of purity and rigor that this person reflects back to him. This friend, he explains, ‘with his religion, knows how to orient himself in life’. The patient who was reduced to anxiety in the face of the decomposition of any paternal image on which he could rely, for a time supports this identification which for him has been authoritative.

As Lacan indicates, ‘When it is a question of covering up anxiety, the ego ideal takes the form of the Almighty’.²²

To conclude, I quote Jacques-Alain Miller who has stated, ‘We are in the phase of leaving the age of the father’.²³ The age of the father gives way to the age of the transgression of the rules.

3. The Symbolic Lack of Authority under Capitalism

The capitalist discourse is omnipresent; it dictates its consumption imperatives which determine previously unseen modes of jouissance. We will see the essential place that this discourse holds with respect to authority for adolescents today.

Let us remember that this variant of the master’s discourse (I refer you to the 2 mathemes which write these discourses) was qualified by Lacan as ‘madly clever’ because it creates an infinite circularity between the subject and the objects of jouissance which never fulfill it.²⁴ These surplus-jouissance objects, which were called *gadgets* in Lacan’s time,

are useless objects; jouissance ‘is what is useless’, Lacan stated in *Encore*. Because no one really believes in ‘a bright tomorrow’ anymore, these gadgets replace the ideals of yesteryear. Rather than helping the subject put his fantasies into action, these objects of surplus jouissance prevent the subject from desiring by putting his fantasies into action; the objects of surplus-jouissance seem more secure than the vagaries of desire, which is always fleeting, in perpetual motion.

The satisfactions that this discourse makes it possible to obtain do without words. Just as they short-circuit a ‘time for understanding’ and a time to question oneself, so they prevent the subject from confronting his or her lack and from confronting the impossible. ‘Nothing is impossible for those who really want it,’ we are told. *If you want, you can. Just do it. Be cool. Be positive* – these are the slogans from which ads are woven. These formulas disseminate imperatives of immediate jouissance and social success, be it in the form of food, drink, clothing, telephones, screens, the list is endless. By increasing inequalities, they also encourage segregation and reinforce the feeling of exclusion, and sometimes of persecution.

This discourse doesn’t want to know anything about the ‘original lack, the structural fault inscribed into the specific being-in-the-world of the subject,’ as Lacan says in *Seminar X, Anxiety*.²⁵ He adds that the capitalist discourse refuses castration and, moreover, that it ‘leaves aside matters of love’.²⁶

Above all, regarding what concerns us for the NLS congress, anxiety arises when the subject, who does not want to know anything about their lack, is confronted with the Other’s desire. In Miller’s words: ‘Freud says that anxiety is linked to the loss of the object, while Lacan says that it emerges when the lack comes to lack, when there are too many objects.’²⁷ Then, the *objet a* arises from a gaze or a demand [*demande*] from the Other. For Lacan, ‘anxiety resides in the subject’s fundamental relationship with ... the desire of the Other’.²⁸

20 E. Laurent, ‘Un nouvel amour pour le père’, *Cause freudienne*, no. 64 (2006), 77.

21 E Laurent, ‘Élucidation’, no. 2 (2002), 26.

22 . Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety, 1962-1963* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 308.

23 J.-A. Miller, back cover, J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI, Desire and Its Interpretation, 1958-1959* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

24 ‘[Discourse of Jacques Lacan at the University of Milan](#) on May 12, 1972’.

25 Lacan, *Anxiety*, 136.

26 J. Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 91.

27 J.-A. Miller, ‘Introduction to the Reading of Jacques Lacan’s *Seminar on Anxiety*’, *Lacanian Ink*, no. 27 (2006), 26.

28 Lacan, *Anxiety*, 279.

The Internet is a potentially infinite source of knowledge. As for social media, it encourages immediate responses that are often marked by disrespect and accompanied by insults that can emanate from adolescents but also, of course, from adults. Owing to a lack of authority, *jouissance* finds no limit. It is a long time since there were any practices of initiation, which all included a limitation on *jouissance* and the bringing into play of a loss that often went as far as ritual mutilation or the inscription of a signifying mark on the body. It should be said that the practice of hazing (officially no longer allowed) is a wild and degrading form of it for the subject, rather than a socially integrating one.

Who is telling the truth?

In the absence of an Other that represents authority, how can we know who is telling the truth about the truth? Social media, which feeds on the misunderstanding that is inherent in language as well as on the confusions [*embrouilles*] of speech that language generates, is often a carrier of hatred: manipulation, harassment, fake news, are propagated there. What Lacan calls the ‘mirage of truth’,²⁹ which is ‘inseparable from the effects of language’,³⁰ sheds light on the success of fake news.

To try to disentangle the true from the false, we now need journalists specialized in fact checking. However, the quest for truth still drives science, as shown, for example, by the frenzy of scientific research to track down the origin of the Covid 19 epidemic; a swarm of publications try to define the truth, that is, what could best detect the cause of a real which is written, namely: ‘18 million deaths in 3 years’.³¹

But who can we believe? Scientists are no longer seen as authorities. Their expertise are questioned and ‘lying truth’, as Lacan called it, has become the rule. On social media and on the Internet, the most delusional theories circulate, and the belief of some people is built on the arrogant certainty of eccentric personalities who claim to be fooled by nothing or nobody.

What is authoritative today?

In our time of ‘liberation of *jouissance*, to use an expression of Miller’s, it is the imperatives of capitalist discourse and the scopic drive that are authoritative and precipitate the adolescent into an addictive spiral, where the latest novelty appears essential.³² The destiny of the object that one appropriates is to be consumed, then thrown away and immediately replaced. Also, the users are then themselves in the position of an object, at the mercy of an Other who controls them and takes advantage of their credulity; their preferences are recorded, their expectations evaluated via algorithms in order to be able to suggest new choices or purchases likely to best satisfy them.

For each of us, the obligation to use screens has a tremendous potential for addiction, the drive solicited being the scopic one.³³ Of all the objects capable of satisfying us, the gaze is the most accessible and the one that least confronts castration, and therefore anxiety, as Lacan showed in his seminar on the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. Binge watching is a prime example, especially the frenetic consumption of television series or of shorter videos on TikTok, chosen by an algorithm, which follow one another at a frantic pace. The images fascinate and capture the gaze that fills the subject, eventually putting it to sleep. They exert a tyrannical power that puts real encounters at a distance, sometimes even leading to a disconnection of the social bond.

For teenagers, it is also the signifiers that circulate on social media that take the place of authority. In this favourite space for enjoying freedom and ‘being Zen’, these signifiers are often conveyed in an imperative mode by advertisements but also by the ‘friendly advice’ of marketing influencers whose media exposure has become a new ideal for many young people. For example, in France, where wearing the veil is prohibited for women in all public spaces (administrations, hospitals, high schools, etc.), ‘veil influencers’ are very active on social media³⁴ and hundreds of teenage girls on TikTok stage their desire to wear the veil in college or high school, to a musical background of excerpts from rap songs. There are also ‘veil tutorials’ on how to transform a scarf into a

29 J. Lacan, ‘Preface to the English Edition of *Seminar XI*’, *The Lacanian Review*, no. 6 (2018), 25

30 J. Lacan, *Seminar XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970* (New York: Norton, 2007), 70.

31 ‘Origine du SARS-CoV-2: le jeu de piste continue’, *Le Monde Sciences & Médecine* 21 December 2022.

32 J.-A. Miller, ‘Une fantaisie’, *Mental*, no. 15 (2005), 19. See ‘A Fantasy’, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks* 34 (December 2019).

33 J. Lacan, ‘Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*’, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press), 67-78.

34 Samuel Laurent and Sylvie Lecherbonnier, *Le Monde*, 4 October 2022.

veil – and vice versa – and thus discreetly break the law. The disoriented adolescent clings to a radical, transgressive, provocative, noisy, insolent discourse, which appeals to the drive more than to thought [*réflexion*]. But, making the Buzz, is it being authentically authoritative?

These imperatives are relayed by the soft voice of the superego, but which comes to be authoritative. Freud had made the superego a prohibiting principle, precisely through the introjection of parental authority. More generally, he made it the voice of civilization, constituting itself as ‘heir to the Oedipus complex’ through identification with the father.³⁵

For Lacan, beyond this prohibition and beyond the father, the superego embodies ‘the imperative of jouissance’ as he says in *Encore*.³⁶ Today, the superego no longer proceeds from parental authority, as Freud maintained a century ago; rather, it feeds above all on the capitalist discourse which reinforces the small inner voice that whispers *Go on! - Enjoy!—Do not deny yourself anything, Realize your wishes*.³⁷

Civilization promotes transparency as a value and makes the right to be informed a requirement. We expect to be able to see everything and know everything—without delay. This tyranny is exercised unconsciously, and it feeds the superego. It pushes the subject to tell everything about his life, to photograph, film and broadcast non-stop to his supposed ‘friends’. This immodest mode of sharing is doomed to shrink the intimate space, even to reduce it to nothing. It contributes to making the contemporary teenager an anxious subject, ravaged by the jouissance of disclosing himself and of being spied on by the Other.

While desire takes the form of a question (*What does the Other want from me? Che vuoi?*), the voice of the superego is an imperative that involves ‘giving in to one’s desire’,³⁸ as Miller says, for example by conforming to the desire of an Other or of a group. It nourishes guilt and pushes the subject to harm himself.

Vignettes

Sarah is a depressed teenager because she is subject to a cruel superego which pushes her

to always be the best in all areas, without the ego ideal being satisfied by her parents. Indeed, her parents, who are very anxious, expect to be reassured by her and cannot bear her discomfort; they are in what she quite rightly calls ‘a role reversal’.

Nick is a young man who comes to talk about his violent impulses—aggression and self-harm—that arise during arguments with his girlfriend, which are unbearable for him. He cannot bear being denied anything. The voice of his father, who was beaten as a child, is always present, in the form of an overwhelming superego which repeats constantly that ‘you have to fight to be a man’. This metaphor is taken by Nick at face value and, in the absence of a fantasy that could function as a screen, it fuels his inclination towards acting.

Today, it is the jouissance communities that are authoritative. They claim that their specific mode of jouissance should be authoritative and recognized in the Common Law. What J.-A. Miller has pinned down as the saying ‘I am what I say’ asserts itself both in the private space and with official institutions, as if saying ‘I am’ was enough to be.

4. Analytic discourse as a compass

By addressing the analyst, the adolescent encounters an Other who gives him the floor but also limits his speech, and takes into account his singular enunciation by noting the signifiers he uses to express his suffering/jouissance.

More than ideals, the analyst is interested in the formations of the unconscious and in what Miller called the ‘abnormal’ elements in relation to collective reality, which are truth, desire and jouissance.³⁹

Rather than aiming for a normalization of adolescent behaviour— which the socio-educational and medical superego never ceases to tell him – ‘*You have to go out, play sports..., you have to make friends... work for your exams, etc.*’— and without taking into account the originality of each subject, our bet is to allow him to work out a solution based on the symptom which he both suffers from and enjoys. It is

35 S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, vol. 19, *Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth, 1961), 48.

36 J. Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XX, Encore, 1972-1973* (New York: Norton, 1998), 3.

37 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVIII, D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, 1970-1971* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

38 J.-A. Miller, ‘Jouer sa partie’, *La Cause du désir*, no. 105 (2020), 23.

39 J.-A. Miller, ‘Le clivage psychanalyse et psychothérapie’, *Mental*, no. 9 (2001), 12.

by relying on this point of *jouissance*, rather than on seeking to eradicate it, that the analyst will be attentive to the objects in which the teenager invests or the solutions that he invents.

Two vignettes

Joachim, a 20-year-old boy who was beaten as a child gets a tattoo on his arm honouring his recently deceased grandmother, who was ‘a pillar’ to him; by doing so, he can appear kind in her eyes, because she ‘can see that she matters’ to him, he says.

Tom, another young man who has chosen to change gender and is in great difficulty with his identifications, chooses to work with pets ‘because they don’t talk’. This solution allows him, at this moment of his transition journey, to protect himself from the relationship to language and from the desire of the Other as well as from sexuality.

The analyst aims to reduce the tyranny of the superego which pushes the subject to *jouissance* and thereby maintains guilt. The analyst also strives to arouse in the adolescent a desire to know about his singular mode of *jouissance*, for which he can begin to take responsibility. This is how the analyst, or an institution like the CPCT, can be an authority for his patient. By acting as a third party between a teenager and the Other, who is often his mother, the institution acquires authority by allowing *jouissance* to find a limit, given a border.

The philosopher Kojève (whose teaching Lacan followed) wrote that ‘exercising authority and using force are mutually exclusive. To exercise authority, ‘you need to do nothing’.⁴⁰

Jacques-Alain Miller discusses authority with reference to the function of the oracle of Delphi. He notes that psychoanalysis ‘knew how to be the refuge against the discourse of science’ and that it ‘knew how to revive the word of the oracles in the age of science’.⁴¹

This reference to the oracle indicates that

authority has to do with the word, with discourse, and not with action.⁴² What is authoritative does not depend on given explanations but on a presence and a saying [*un dire*] that can produce ‘an effect of truth’. This oracular mode of saying—this ‘*that’s how it is* [*c’est ainsi*] ... to which interpretation is attached’—proposes, as Miller suggests, ‘to bring language back to the games possible in language’ whose ‘model is the wit, the Witz of which Lacan says that it allows one to pass through the door beyond which there is nothing more to find.’ Authority is also located on the side of the patient who, under transference, can become the author of a saying [*un dire*] that will calm his anxiety, limit his *jouissance* and be authoritative for him.

Vignette

*Alexis, a 16-year-old teenager asks for a consultation because he feels ‘very alone since the lockdowns and a relationship breakup’. The treatment will focus on his difficulty in establishing a relationship with another without being overwhelmed by the anxiety of being abandoned. Having encountered the impossibility of ‘controlling everything’ in his sessions at the CPCT, he tries what he calls ‘taking the time to listen to the other’. This involves refusing to give in to the *jouissance* of always imposing himself. This enunciation will be authoritative for him.*

We see with this vignette that, as Lacan says in Seminar X, anxiety is an ‘intermediate term between *jouissance* and desire’.⁴³ Daniel Roy extends this formulation in his presentation for the congress when he writes that ‘the way of anxiety is also the way of desire’. That is to say, it is by the way of anxiety that a subject can ‘read his discontent in civilization ... as a symptom in its singularity’.

The analyst’s desire, which aims for ‘absolute difference’ (Lacan in Seminar XI), and the absolute singularity of each subject, is what makes the analyst’s interpretations authoritative. Authority is therefore not asserted by the norm but by desire.

40 A. Kojève, *The Notion of Authority* (London: Verso, 2014), 11.

41 J.-A. Miller, L’orientation lacanienne, *Un effort de poésie*, 13 November 2002, unpublished.

42 ‘The oracle embodies the authority of speech as such.’ Miller, *Un effort de poésie*, 13 November 2002.

43 Lacan, *Anxiety*, 175.

Diagnosis in the Clinic: From Structure to Sinthome

Frank Rollier

I will share with you some considerations on the current state of the diagnostic question in the Schools of the AMP, based on the teaching of Lacan and of J-A Miller. My references to the current era will concern France in particular and, although we belong to the same Western world, many differences exist between your country and mine, and I look forward to learning from you how this diagnostic question arises for you today.

The clinic versus psychoanalysis

What do we mean when we talk about clinic? At stake is more than an opposition between theory on the one hand and clinical practice on the other. The Greek root of the word ‘clinic’—*klinē*—designates what happens at the foot of the patient's bed, and as such denotes a bedside art. It is a procedure that consists of noting signs—which we call clinical signs—and grouping them into different categories. This is why Jacques-Alain Miller compares the clinic to a herbarium, a collection of different plant specimens.

Clinical practice, it should be stressed at the outset, is to be differentiated from psychoanalysis, which is primarily interested in a subject's *jouissance* and the symptom he presents; that is to say, in the way in which *jouissance* is linked to certain signifiers for him or her. Unlike behaviourist and cognitivist

approaches, Lacanian psychoanalysts consider that the symptom never ceases to be written, that it is necessary and thus a part of life. We reject the idea that one's symptom can disappear, or that there is such a thing as harmonious normality or even ‘mental health’, as put forward by the World Health Organization. In line with Freud, we consider the symptom to act as protection in relation to *jouissance*.

The psychoanalyst is, therefore, interested in the singularity of each subject, rather than in fitting him into a particular category or class. Does this mean that an analyst must lose interest in diagnosis in the clinical setting of psychoanalysis, which is a clinical experience subject to transference? In what follows I will argue that diagnosis, and therefore clinical practice, are important for psychoanalysis in so far as they help enlighten the analyst in the preliminary sessions with an analysand, so that he can subsequently do without it. This will be the central theme of my presentation.

In all cases, this clinic involves meeting with a patient face-to-face; the diagnosis occurs only afterwards. This is precisely what Lacan evokes in one of his earliest texts, translated by Russell Grigg, when, regarding the Papin sisters, he writes of avoiding ‘the reproach of making a diagnosis without having examined the patients myself’.² Rather than speak

1 Presentation at the Lacan Circle of Australia, Melbourne, Saturday April 27.

2 J. Lacan, *First Writings* (Cambridge: Polity, 2024), 84.

in terms of a diagnosis, he will talk, about his ‘thesis’ regarding the two sisters.

Diagnosing means differentiating and naming

All human societies, whether traditional or modern, make use of diagnoses. At its Greek roots, the word denotes a function of differentiating or distinguishing. A clinical diagnosis is always ‘differential’ and depends upon what a society recognizes as the norm and what it qualifies as madness.

But to make a diagnosis is to identify and thereby classify a subject, which in turn has social and subjective consequences which can vary depending on the authority which makes the diagnosis and according to what each culture prescribes as a solution. A clinical diagnosis always depends on a particular society’s ideas about what constitutes the norm and what it qualifies as madness. A diagnosis of madness can lead to a subject’s exclusion from the community or even to his confinement, which is a decision usually made by the police, political, or religious authority. It can sometimes lead to a ritualized treatment prescribed by a healer or a religious authority (medications, trances, or even exorcism), which can coexist with scientific, chemical or electrical treatments. Fortunately, for our desire as analysts, it can sometimes take the form of a talking treatment, either recommended to, or chosen by, the patient.

On a subjective level:

In health-care institutions, teams are often questioned about a diagnosis, for example that of ‘gender dysphoria’ or ‘gender transition’. I have heard from professionals who come to CPCT training that some prefer to avoid naming the problem, because this type of question sometimes ‘destructures the team’.

A diagnosis, then, can have a subjective effect on caregivers. This is the case with practitioners—psychologists, doctors, social workers, etc.—working in the private sector, as well as for psychoanalysts. Making a diagnosis has consequences for how the patient will be cared for as well as the conduct of the analytical treatment and the analytical act itself. Diagnosis is part of the treatment.

These days, a diagnosis is often presented directly to the patient. From the patient’s perspective, it is

sometimes a relief to receive a diagnosis and to recognise oneself—and one’s enigmatic *jouissance*—in it. It gives it meaning. A melancholic patient who identifies with waste may be soothed by a diagnosis of social phobia. The diagnosis can sometimes confer a form of identity that the subject can claim: ‘I am bipolar’, ‘I have a post-traumatic syndrome’, ‘I am a drug addict’, etc. Other times the patient might reject the diagnosis entirely: ‘I was called schizophrenic’, or ‘I was called an alcoholic’, ‘but it’s nonsense!’

Some adolescents are quick to recognize themselves in one of the more publicized diagnoses—bipolar, school phobic, ADHD, early onset, etc.—which they often pick up on social networks and from influencers. Today the ‘right to self-determination’ and to self-diagnosis is a growing demand, which summarizes a subjective position as “I am what I say.”³ It is the new dogma, be it ‘I am trans’, or ‘I am autistic’, or ‘I am skinny’, or ‘I am a sex bomber’, or even ‘I am what I want’. Marie-Hélène Brousse stressed that this contemporary movement of self-description of the body’s mode of *jouissance* is an ‘attempt to manufacture an ego where there is a lack of being’.⁴ What presents itself as the affirmation of the intimate truth of the subject is in fact a demand for recognition of his singular mode of *jouissance*, which on the one hand maintains segregation and on the other hand closes the door to the unconscious. The subject then becomes a pure object of the superego’s *jouissance*, or the *jouissance* of an Other, immune against dreams and slips of the tongue which could lead to desire. It should not be overlooked that this self-designation can be an attempt by the subject to make a name for him or herself and create a symptom, and in this sense it should be welcomed and respected.

Diagnosis from Freud to Lacan

In his early work, Freud relied on the neurological and psychiatric knowledge of his time. For example, in his first letters to Fliess, he speaks of cerebral hysteria (1888), periodic depression, anxiety neurosis (1892), and neurasthenia, which he quickly qualified as sexual neurosis (manuscript B. of 1893).

In his 1932 thesis, where he presents the Aimée case, Lacan discusses at length the ‘diagnosis’ of his patient, based on the psychiatric nosography of

3 Theme of the 52nd Journées of the École de la Cause freudienne, November 2022.

4 M.-H. Brousse, Interview in J.-N. Donnart, A. Oger and M.-C. Segalen (eds.), *Adolescents, sujets de désordre* (Paris : Éditions Michèle, 2017), 165

the time, and finally proposes his famous ‘paranoia of self-punishment’. This is not a diagnosis per se but what he calls a ‘clinical type’,⁵ which is based on an analysis of the ‘development of the subject’s personality’. Subsequently, he only occasionally uses the language of diagnosis, such as in his seminar on *The Psychoses*, when he notes that ‘we must insist upon the presence of these disorders [at the level of language] before making a diagnosis of psychosis’.⁶ Elsewhere he mentions the ‘diagnosis of perverse structure’⁷ or even ‘the correct diagnosis’ of phobia⁸ in relation to a case of exhibitionism.

Diagnosis involves classification and this can lead to a kind of dictionary. We can evoke what Michel Leiris, a structuralist writer and friend of Lacan, wrote:

A monstrous aberration makes men believe that language was born to facilitate their mutual relations. It is with this aim of utility that they write dictionaries, where words are catalogued, endowed with a well-defined meaning (or so they believe), based on custom and etymology.

Lacan, for whom ‘to understand patients is a pure mirage’, is more interested in ‘clinical structures’ than in classifications, dictionaries, and so on.⁹

Structural diagnosis

Freud’s famous reference from 1933 to the metaphor of the crystal suggests something of this concept of structure:

If we throw a crystal to the floor, it breaks; but not into haphazard pieces. It comes apart along its lines of cleavage into fragments whose boundaries, though they were invisible, were predetermined by the crystal’s structure [*Struktur*]. Mental patients are split and broken structures of this same kind.¹⁰

The crystal therefore breaks along the fault lines that structure it.

Lacan, too, made reference to structure in a 1931 article, published prior to his thesis, entitled ‘Structure of the paranoid psychoses’, and published in *Early Writings (Premiers écrits)*. According to Éric Laurent, Lacan here uses the term ‘structure’ ‘in a phenomenological sense, as the specificity of an existential experience conceived as a whole’.¹¹ Linguistics was key to Lacan’s rereading of Freud, allowing him to isolate the symbolic dimension of the signifier, as well as the imaginary phenomena that preoccupied other post-Freudians. It was this that led him to think of psychic processes in terms of structure.

In his 1954 seminar on *The Psychoses*, he emphasised the necessity for any approach which aims at scientific rigor, to detach itself from the phenomena in order to understand, beyond them, the structural constants. It is from here, he stressed, that the analyst ‘shall proceed [...] setting out from the subject’s discourse’.¹² Structure, then, for Lacan was understood as ‘a manifestation of the signifier’, so that ‘the notion of structure and that of signifier [appear] inseparable’.¹³ The structure, then, orders all the effects produced by language. The divided subject is the effect of the signifying structural logic and Lacan defines the subject as ‘what the signifier represents [...] to another signifier’.¹⁴ The subject disappears under the signifier which represents it.

The word ‘structure’—stemming from the Latin ‘struere’—refers to the idea of a construction, of strata where one element cannot move without the others being displaced. Lacan speaks of ‘reciprocal references’.¹⁵ The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss situates structure as ‘a system of oppositions and correlations which integrates all the elements of a total situation’, as ‘a whole where everything fits together’.¹⁶ It’s in this sense that the myth of Oedipus is a structure: it is an effect of the relationship of the speaking being to language, and it is according to this structure that desire will be ordered.¹⁷ Indeed, it is by

5 J. Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 347

6 J. Lacan, *The Seminar, Book III, The Psychoses, 1955-1956*, trans. R. Grigg (New York: Norton, 1993), 92.

7 J. Lacan, *Le séminaire Livre IX L’Identification, 1961-1962*, 2 May 1962, unpublished.

8 J. Lacan, ‘The direction of the treatment and the principles of its power’, *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink (New York: Norton 2006), 510.

9 J. Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 6.

10 S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth, 1964), 59.

11 E. Laurent, oral presentation, Val de Grâce Hospital, September 2005.

12 Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 61.

13 Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 183-84.

14 J. Lacan, ‘Position of the Unconscious’, *Écrits*, 708.

15 Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 184.

16 C. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1974), 218.

17 Cf. M. Safouan, *Le structuralisme en psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 17.

transgressing the prohibition of the murder of the father that Oedipus gains access to the his mother's jouissance. For Freud, these two crimes—parricide and incest—comprise 'the paradigm of the psychic structure'.¹⁸ With the matheme of the paternal metaphor, where the father and the mother are signifiers with a function, Lacan will move the Oedipus complex from myth to structure. The structure then indicates that 'there is some symbolic in the real'.¹⁹

Although Lacan was closely associated with the structuralists, they nonetheless rejected his concept of structure because of the way it integrates the dimension of the subject, which they reject. Miller notes that in Lacan's first teaching, 'the ancient clinical classes inherited from a tradition appear as so many structures'.²⁰ These clinical classes are neurosis and psychosis—each of which has subclasses (phobia, hysteria, obsessional neurosis, paranoia, schizophrenia, autism)—and perversion.

Miller provides another insight when he argues that 'what Lacan found in structure is an answer to the question of the real [...] which led him to pose that what is real and what is cause in the Freudian field, is the structure of language'. This means that 'the concept of structure adds the [notion of] cause to the class',²¹ the notion of cause as the element of the real. This leads Miller to say that 'for Lacan, the unconscious is a structure, that is to say knowledge in the real'.²²

Beyond structure

Lacan goes on to develop his concept of discourse by way of four modalities of discourse—the master, the hysteric, the university, and the analyst). Each of these modalities, expressed by Lacan via mathemes, corresponds to a modality of jouissance and to a certain type of social link. Each discourse has four elements which permutate in four places: the barred subject, the master signifier S1, the other signifiers S2 and the *objet a*. Following this, we can surmise that

the notion of structure is cashed out in terms of the four discourses.

The concept of structure is therefore based on its 'combinatorial character' or 'its potentialities of displacement', according to Miller. A limit to this concept appears with Lacan's logical proposition that the 'sexual relation' is impossible to write. As a consequence, the jouissance of the subject then appears to be One, 'idiotic and solitary', and therefore it 'does not establish a relationship with the Other by itself'. This, says Miller, 'limits the concept of structure'.²³ If the sexual relation cannot be written, 'there is a relationship [which is] given over to contingency, removed from necessity', while the structure is something which is written and which 'presents itself as a necessity'.²⁴ In fact, Miller proposes, the structure should be understood as containing holes; it is in those holes that 'there is room for invention'.²⁵

In 1998, Miller proposed the notion of 'ordinary psychosis' which expanded the concept of structure. 'Ordinary psychosis' cannot be objectified in measurable behaviours; it manifests itself neither by a major disorder nor by anti-social behaviour. In the absence of any trigger, it can be considered where there are other signs pointing to a psychosis: language disorders, a body that is poorly or not-so-poorly constructed, body phenomena, or even more ordinary, more discreet signs. It can be a feeling of weirdness, a life of wandering, sometimes the absence of symptoms other than the need to be conforming, normal, often accompanied by a feeling of emptiness. Miller, quoting Lacan, speaks of 'a disturbance that occurs at the inmost juncture of the subject's sense of life'.²⁶ He refers to small clues of foreclosure to look for, such as the adjustment of one's life to imaginary identifications.²⁷

The 'ordinary psychosis' hypothesis does not exclude the possibility of a structural diagnosis when we consider the possible mode of decompensation of this psychosis. Rather, its main purpose is to help

18 M.-H Brousse et J. Miller, 'Le criminel et son crime', *L'Âne*, no. 8 (1983), 36.

19 J.-A. Miller, *Cours, Le lieu et le lien*, 14-28 November 2001.

20 J.-A. Miller, *Cours, Choses de finesse en psychanalyse*, 10 December 2008.

21 Miller, *Choses de finesse*, 10 December 2008

22 J.-A. Miller, *Cours, L'Un tout seul*, 26 January 2011

23 J.-A. Miller, 'Six Paradigms of Jouissance', *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, no. 33 (2019).

24 The 6th paradigm of jouissance proposed by J.-A. Miller

25 J.-A. Miller, 'The Six Paradigms of Jouissance'.

26 J. Lacan, 'On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis', *Ecrits*, 466.

27 J.-A. Miller, 'Effet retour sur la psychose ordinaire', *Quarto*, nos. 94-95 (2009), 45.

refine the diagnosis of psychosis where there is no apparent triggering, therefore making itself useful in overcoming the impasse of the pseudo-diagnosis of borderline state.

From singularity to sinthome

Lacan's concept of sinthome, put forward in his late teachings as he is developing his theory of the Borromean knots, 'erases the boundaries between neurosis and psychosis'.²⁸ What operates is the real-symbolic-imaginary knotting and the sinthome is what creates the knot, a knot that endures. The paradigmatic exemplification of the sinthome is James Joyce, a subject who eludes all classification and who exists outside the clinic, having never done a psychoanalysis. His case is absolutely 'singular' (which is to be differentiated from a 'particular' case which is susceptible to comparisons and can be attached to a class). The clue to Joyce's case is the episode of the beating he suffered at the hands of his school mates. Joyce responded to this event with indifference, his body then appearing like an empty envelope.²⁹ In a logic of knots, this moment is characterized by a shift in the imaginary that 'clears off'.³⁰

A sinthome will come to the place where the knot fails. In the case of Joyce, Lacan proposes, 'his desire to be an artist who would keep the whole world busy'.³¹ As a consequence, his own name, his proper name, came to represent 'a way of suppletion for the fact that the three registers were never knotted together'.³² It was also a way, for Lacan, of 'compensating for the fact that his father was never a father to him'.³³ The ego will reconnect the imaginary with the real and the symbolic.³⁴ The diagnosis, if we can still refer to it as such, boils down to identifying when and how the knot has come undone, and also how a sinthome 'makes it possible for the symbolic, the imaginary and the real to continue to hold together'.³⁵

This Borromean reading does not, however, prevent Lacan from referring to a more classic conception when he speaks of Joyce as 'de facto foreclosed',³⁶ thereby raising the question of whether he was mad.³⁷

We can ask ourselves whether a sinthome is only valid for psychotic subjects as a singular solution in the absence of the signifier the Name-of-the-Father. Among neurotics, the signifier the Name-of-the-Father, means that there is no obligation to find a singular solution. That said, the Name-of-the-Father is only one possible version of what holds RSI together—the Oedipal suppletion being only one among others. As such, each subject does not have the same Name-of-the-Father, and so, in our era of 'the Other who does not exist', the Name-of-the-Father function is often inoperative. That is to say, it never achieves a perfect knot.

From diagnosis to singularity

The sinthome, then, is 'the singular concept par excellence'.³⁸ It introduces the idea that each subject must invent their own solution to make the knot hold. As a concept, it allows for more focus on what might constitute such a solution for a subject, rather than on what a subject lacks in relation to a supposed normality. The sinthome comes in place of the relationship to the unconscious, which we no longer try to decipher.

This leads us to a revised sense of the clinic that is no longer structuralist; it is discontinuous, with no clearly differentiated classes. It is a Borromean clinic of a continuum, which focuses on the study of deformations or ruptures of knots. If we consider that in neurosis it is the Name-of-the-Father that acts as the quilting point, and that in psychosis it is something other than the Name-of-the-Father, then, as Miller has noted, 'We can speak of neurosis as a subset of psychosis, mainly for ironic purposes'.³⁹

28 J.-A. Miller 'Choses de finesse', 17 December 2008.

29 See J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII, The Sinthome (1975-1976)*, 128-29.

30 Lacan, *Sinthome*, 131.

31 Lacan, *Sinthome*, 72.

32 Lacan, *Sinthome*, 131.

33 Lacan, *Sinthome*, 88.

34 Lacan, *Sinthome*, 152.

35 Lacan, *Sinthome*, 94.

36 Lacan, *Sinthome*, 89.

37 Lacan, *Sinthome*, 87.

38 J.-A. Miller, 'L'inconscient et le sinthome', *La Cause freudienne*, no. 71 (2009), 74.

39 J.-A. Miller, in IRMA (ed.), *Conversation d'Arcachon* (Paris:Agalma, 1997), 256.

It was a similar thought that led Lacan to say that ‘everyone is mad’ or ‘delusional’.⁴⁰ In so saying, Lacan removed any reference to a norm, even if everyone has his singular way of being crazy and invents his own solution to confront the hole, the absence of any guarantee in the Other, S(A).

Rather than thinking in terms of a binary structure—whether or not there is psychosis, or more precisely, whether or not the signifier the Name-of-the-Father is present, for example—it is interesting to consider this signifier, or another operator than the Name-of-the-Father, as an apparatus enabling one to treat *jouissance*, more or less, in degrees. We thus arrive at the notion of a continuum clinic, whose paradigm might be the reed that bends in the wind, unlike the oak which resists or breaks.⁴¹ It is also possible to locate in this clinic the proposition according to which we are all autistic, since at the heart of each speaking being there is an autistic *jouissance* which constitutes the dark side of the symptom. It is this *jouissance* which is the very core of any treatment oriented by the teaching of Lacan. The Analysts of the School (A.S.’s) bear witness to this autistic *jouissance*—impossible to nihilate—and to its destiny during and after the treatment.

The psychoanalyst faced with the diagnoses of our time

Today, diagnoses are increasingly common, particularly in child and adolescent psychiatry. These diagnoses tend to ignore both the subjective dimension and that of the symptom; both are reduced to behavioural disorders—Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders, transidentity, etc.—likely to be re-educated or treated with medication. Signifiers such as ‘dysfunction’, ‘disability’, ‘harassment’, ‘victim’, and so on, are more and more common. Questioning the applicability of these terms to a child’s or an adolescent’s parent will often arouse hostility. ‘Brain-mania’ also invades the media space and reduces an entire pathology to neurological causality that must be treated with drugs or microsurgery.

Miller emphasizes that ‘the legalization of *jouissance* is paid for by non-symptomization’.⁴² However,

he says that ‘zero symptom is the return to the inanimate’. He adds,

Contemporary de-pathologization is not only the consequence of the dissolution of the clinic due to the DSM and the promotion of medicine as the universal key to ‘mental disorder’ but is also a consequence of the deconstruction of the normal, classically opposed to pathological.⁴³

Once the normal is deconstructed as a ‘male norm’, he says, ‘the pathological deconstructs’ and ‘the pathologies of yesteryear are doomed to become “lifestyles”’. There are also diagnoses which function as a plug, such as incest. We can also question the function of alcoholism or drug addiction diagnoses. They may have a social role but they say nothing about the structure of the subject.

What, then, should the psychoanalyst’s relationship to diagnosis be?

Clinical diagnosis is a relevant part of the analyst’s training—as distinct from the analyst’s formation which occurs in his or her own analysis. It is also relevant to the patient’s discourse, in so far as we often refer to neurosis, psychosis and perversion, as well as to their subclasses. Likewise, we evoke the Freudian and Lacanian concepts like castration (which can be denied, refused or foreclosed—*Verleugnung*, *Verneinung*, *Verwerfung*) as well as the presence or foreclosure for a subject of the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father and its corresponding phallic meaning.

The mathemes of the discourses allow us to approach the diagnosis of structure in an even finer way. This logical reduction has a very practical implication. Rather than seeking to make a classic diagnosis by placing the subject in a particular category, it is possible to ask how this subject is situated in relation to the four elements of discourse. How is the subject articulated by way of the signifying chain and the *objet a*? Moreover, is the subject we receive divided or not? Is there a master signifier, S1, that emerges from his words? Is this master signifier alone or can it be linked to other signifiers, to a signifying chain? What, then, is the subject’s relationship to

40 J. Lacan, ‘Lacan pour Vincennes’, *Ornicar?* Nos. 17/18 (1979), 278.

41 See IRMA (ed.), *Convention d’Antibes* (Paris: Agalma, 2005).

42 J.-A. Miller, ‘Présentation’, *Enfants violents* (2019).

43 J.-A. Miller, ‘Trois questions à Jacques-Alain Miller’, L’Hebdo-Blog no. 326, 5 février 2024.

knowledge, S2? Is he frozen in certainty about knowledge, or does he have access to a dialectic, even to doubt, which mobilizes the signifying chain? Beyond this, we might ask, is the object housed in the Other? Alternatively, is the object of enjoyment found 'in the pocket' of the patient (as Lacan suggested), who then often feels targeted by a wicked Other or reduced to the state of waste? The answers to these questions will guide the conduct of any cure or treatment.

The continuum clinic, the clinic of the sinthome and of knots, has its place because it is this clinic that allows the analyst to be oriented towards what is singular and towards the real of jouissance, as that is what is incomparable in his patient. It does not, however, eliminate the structural clinic. The Lacanian orientation is to make use of it, and then to be able to do without it.

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Destiny

Peichi Su¹

From the material of an admission interview carried out in a mental health centre, the present article aims to address the trace of destiny that is heard in the patient's speech. From this angle, this paper will analyse the material by articulating it with the contributions of different authors belonging to the field of Lacanian orientation psychoanalysis.

Two questions will guide the central axes of this work: Has everything remained unchangeable? Will the subject have room to manoeuvre a different path?

Excerpts from the first interview

A = analyst

O = Oliver, a 24 year-old young man.

Oliver enters the office, greets the analyst and sits down. He speaks slowly and is quite reticent throughout the interview.

A: *What brings you here?*

O: *A promise to my girlfriend... To be honest, I don't know if I really want to see a psychologist.*

A: *Why not?*

Oliver says that his mother and father have passed away, so he is currently responsible for taking care of his brother and his grandparents.

A: *Why did your girlfriend send you here?*

O: *We have fought several times, she says I take it out on her...*

A: *And what do you think? Is that so?*

O: *Surely so... because I'm quite angry...*

A: *What kind of anger?*

O: *I feel that things overwhelm me, that there is no justice, and sometimes things explode... The responsibility for my family weighs heavily on me... I can't think about the future... I can't make plans for anything...*

A: *What do you do?*

O: *I work in a company.*

A: *Do you do anything else?*

O: *No, I don't.*

A: *Do you study?*

O: *I tried college but it didn't work.*

A: *What happened there?*

O: *I don't fit in with people. I can't handle everything they ask me to study.*

A: *Why can't you?*

O: *Because of how I am.*

A: *What are you like?*

O: *It takes me a long time to study... It costs me more than others... But I'm also interested in computing, and computer technicians are in demand...*

(Oliver stops talking and remains silent. He looks around and observes the office. There is a long silence...)

¹ Text revised and modified by the author from the article '[Del destino inamovible al camino de las nuevas posibilidades](#)', National Autonomous University of Mexico, November 2005.

A: *Don't you think that through talking things might decompress a bit?*

O: *To talk about intimate things, I'd rather talk with a friend than with a stranger... I don't know... I'm not saying it's not useful, I'm here for a reason... But I don't know if there's going to be any solution. My life got off on the wrong foot.*

In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' Freud describes the ways in which a neurotic patient finds himself inexplicably reliving certain painful and unwanted events from his life over and over again, without a sense of control. This, he writes, can provoke a sense that the patient is living out his life according to a predestined formula. 'We have come across people all of whose human relationships have the same outcome... or the man whose friendships all end in betrayal by his friend ... or, again, the lover each of whose love affairs with a woman passes through the same phases and reaches the same conclusion.'² This *eternal return of the same*, Freud goes on to say, is less surprising when it occurs in people whose behaviour he describes as *active*. What is surprising, however, is when this repetition occurs in people who experience the repetition in a *passive way*.³

Ideas of destiny or fate are raised in Oliver's speech, too. 'I feel that things overwhelm me, there is no justice,' he says. Elsewhere: 'I don't know if there's going to be any solution. My life got off on the wrong foot.' Observing the ways in which the subject can feel possessed by some 'daemoniac' power, Freud was led to the conclusion that in psychic life, there is a repetition compulsion that exists beyond the pleasure principle.⁴

Discussing the same concept, Lacan underlines that behind every automaton lies what he terms the *tyché*, or 'the encounter with the real'.⁵ The *real* is beyond the automaton; it is, in his language, beyond the insistence of the signs to which we are directed by the pleasure principle. The only way to encounter the real, for Lacan, is through this *failed encounter*, through that which always escapes in each repetition

In Oliver's repetitions—those tragic biographical events that he experiences over and over again—

something of the *real* is heard, even as it remains ungraspable. For Lacan, in each 'failed encounter', what remains ungraspable is, at the same time, the 'cause' of each repetition. This is what Lacan has named as 'that which never ceases not being written'.

In his seminar on 'The Purloined Letter', he emphasizes that everything captured by the symbolic order is overdetermined in a way that creates a 'law of series'. This is a chain of signifiers that, when deployed, creates possibilities and impossibilities. It is in this way that the 'series' becomes a writing that repeats itself in the unconscious.

Regarding chance and determination, Diana Rabinovich explains that there is always an element of indetermination linked to how the signifiers organize the 'match' (a metaphor she borrows from chess) in which the subject is *played*. Rabinovitch stresses the passive position here, and she emphasises that this match does not exist a priori. She demonstrates that there are certain expressions that turn out to be difficult to use in psychoanalysis; for example, we cannot strictly say that someone 'plans his own ruin'. What we observe retrospectively is a consistency and a legality, but this only can be seen when the game is over, when that person is ruined. That is to say, this determination is a determination where the person is 'played' – and this is how the *passive* characteristic arises; the subject does not recognise himself as having any control in this game. The psychoanalyst in turn, must intervene in this repetition or *chain of determination*.⁶ To do this, *necessity* must be turned back into *contingency*.

In *Écrits*, Lacan emphasizes that 'only speech bears witness ... to that part of the powers of the past that has been thrust aside at each crossroads where an event has chosen'.⁷ That is to say, the event implies a certain degree of chance. That Oliver had become responsible for his brother due to the early death of both his parents is beyond his own choice, but these remain facts that will have a direct impact on how he will position himself subjectively.⁸

Unlike in Greek tragedy, where destiny denotes a degree of necessity, in psychoanalytic discourse,

2 S. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', *Standard Edition* vol. 12 (London: Hogarth, 1958), 22.

3 Freud, 'Beyond', 22.

4 Freud, 'Beyond', 22.

5 Lacan, 'Tuché and Automaton', *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press: 1977), 53.

6 Diana Rabinovich, Seminars given at the Psychology Department of Buenos Aires University, 1997. Unpublished.

7 J. Lacan, 'Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 213.

8 Rabinovich, Seminars.

destiny is not immovable; it is not *necessary*.⁹ In psychoanalysis, a subject's history has been structured out of contingencies. What might seem necessary could in fact have been quite different. This is why Lacan underlined the importance of recovering the *true memory* and not the exact memory.¹⁰ In other words, what matters is what the subject recalls and not what has really happened.

Discussion of contingency raises questions of responsibility. For J. C. Mosca, responsibility implies that something is being asked of the subject. The subject is required to take responsibility for his actions. Our interest is in the subjectivation of the action. It is no longer just any action, but rather one that falls on the subject himself, throwing him into action. In Oliver's case, if he appealed to chance, he would find a way to absolve himself of responsibility. But in this matter J.C. Mosca wonders: 'does the necessary result determined by a pre-existing combinatory erase the subject? If the subject is the subject of the unconscious, an abided subject, is he then exonerated from the enactment of a kind of obedience due to potentially pre-existing determinations? In other words, is there no longer any possible act?'¹¹

Mosca emphasizes that this is not a question of morality, nor is it about changing the facts. Rather, what must be stressed is that the fact *is* important for the subject himself. The unexpected events in Oliver's life touched him profoundly, bordering on the *real*.¹² This raises a question: if Oliver subjectively involved himself and took responsibility for what he lived through, could there be a chance to open up some analytic work? For Mosca, whether or not the subject has a choice, he is nonetheless responsible.¹³

In his 'Introduction to the psychoanalytic method' Jacques-Alain Miller proposes that *subjective location* introduces the subject into the unconscious. That is to say, analytic work attempts to question the *position* taken by the speaker in relation to what he has said (*dit*) in the clinic. Taking into consideration what a person has *said*, the analytic work can locate a person's *saying*; the analytic discourse differen-

tiates a subject's *statement* (what is said) from his/her *enunciation* (how he/she says it). So when Oliver says: 'I don't fit with people because of how I am', one should listen to not just the statement itself, but also to the enunciation, which here gives expression to Oliver's sense of victimhood. Miller writes: 'there is no signifying chain that does not raise the question of the subject, who speaks and from what position the subject speaks, since in every signifying chain the matter is about the attribution to the subject, to the subject of what is said.'¹⁴

For Miller, it is the analyst's task to attempt to separate the statement from the enunciation. In so doing, he guides the patient towards an encounter with the unconscious. On this path, the analyst leads the patient to question his *desire* and what he *wants to say*. At one point in the interview with Oliver, the analyst asks, *What are you like?*, to which Oliver answers: *It takes me a while to study... It's harder for me than the others*. He then changes the subject: *But I'm interested in computing*. In this statement, it seems something of the patient's desire is suddenly glimpsed.

Miller emphasises that a *subject* is neither a person nor an individual. In his terms, the subject is not a datum but a *discontinuity* in the datum. Miller highlights that at the level of objectivity the subject does not exist, and it is the analyst's responsibility to produce another level to the subject. This is an ethical matter for psychoanalysis.¹⁵ On the other hand, Miller emphasizes that though the subject can arrive at a position by which he can name his suffering, analysis is not about suffering per se. This is because from the moment he addresses the analyst his suffering is transformed into a complaint, a complaint for the Other.

In this regard, Lacan emphasises that when a patient is referred to the doctor, or when he arrives to the doctor's office, one cannot be sure that he is coming with the intention to be cured. Patients, Lacan reminds us, sometimes want doctors to simply authenticate them as sick.¹⁶ Similarly, it is by no

9 Rabinovich, Seminars.

10 Lacan, 'Function and Field', 249.

11 Juan Carlos Mosca, 'Responsabilidad: otro nombre del sujeto', in J. J. M. Fariña (ed.), *Ética, un horizonte en quiebra* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2002), 119.

12 Mosca, 'Responsabilidad', 120.

13 Mosca, 'Responsabilidad', 121.

14 J.-A. Miller, *Introducción al método psicoanalítico* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1997), 50.

15 Miller, *Introducción*, 63.

16 J. Lacan, 'Psychanalyse et médecine', *Lettres de l'École Freudienne de Paris*, no. 1 (1967), 34-61.

means clear that Oliver has come to the analyst to rid himself of his symptom. He may well have come to receive confirmation of his miserable destiny.

Legal responsibility and subjective responsibility

What distinguishes Freud's understanding of intentionality from that of the jurists, according to J. Jinkis, is that for Freud, intentionality cannot be restricted to the bounds of the ego; it is not always deliberate.¹⁷ In most courts of law, an individual cannot be blamed for certain acts if he was not fully lucid or in a state to govern his reasoning at the time. For Freud, this lack of lucidity does not, however, mean that a subject is less responsible for his actions. How does the analyst make the subject claim responsibility is the work of analysis? Jinkis argues that revealing the symbolic coordinates of a particular set of circumstances can help the subject reintegrate those coordinates into his own history. That is to say, by introducing the responsibility of the subject into the analytical work, that position of feeling trapped by destiny—a destiny that was already written even before the arrival of the subject—will eventually dissipate.

As Lacan underscores, 'One is only responsible within the limits of one's *savoir-faire*.' 'What is *savoir-faire*?', he asks. 'It is art, artifice, that which endues a remarkable quality to the art of which one is capable'.¹⁸ In this sense, the analytic discourse can enable a path in the patient's speech toward contingency. In so doing, it can reopen the game of chance, and reopen the game of *contingencies* and his *savoir-faire*.

17 J. Jinkis, 'Vergüenza y responsabilidad' (Buenos Aires: CEP, 2003).

18 J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII, The Sinthome* (1975-1976) (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 47.

**Two aspects of the modern
technological world's
exploitation of desire**

The Fall of the Object to Earth

Object a at the Zenith, *Immonde* and Discontent¹

Rik Loose

Psychoanalysis and science once walked the same path because science supposes there is knowledge in the real (of nature and the universe).² Science supposes that there exists a signifier in the world that has no connection with a subject. This idea is what characterises modern science and especially mathematical physics and sets it apart from the science of ancient times, such as Thales from Miletus, who gave birth to philosophy—which was originally not separated from science—at the start of the sixth century.³ Freudian analysis responds to this with the idea that there are signifiers that exist independently of consciousness, the unconscious subject being an effect of the functioning of these signifiers.

One can see a certain compatibility that exists here between science and psychoanalysis. This prompted Lacan to say that psychoanalysis was not possible before Descartes.⁴ For Descartes, mathematics is essential for science and truth must consent to it. Newton ran with this idea and began to apply it to the cosmos, arriving at the conclusion that there is only an endless universe.⁵ Cosmos suggests a

limited space of potential harmony in which knowledge can become complete. Universe suggests none of that is possible and that now we must contend with a human who is subject to a limitless universe in which knowledge cannot be complete anymore and all wisdom fails.⁶ That is a problem for science. It attempted to resolve it by stating that there is an articulated network of signifiers that functions in that real, independently of the knowledge we have of it.⁷ We should mention that there is, of course, a crucial difference with psychoanalysis in that whereas Descartes excluded the subject with his *Cogito*, thereby opening the way for Newton and science to concentrate on the object, Freud, by contrast, took the subject as his primary focus.

Anyway, science presents itself as a discourse without a subject and behaves as if the real of nature knows, indeed as if this real contains knowledge that had hitherto been unconscious.⁸ This idea became a crucial compass for Freud, and Lacan agreed with him in the classical period of his work. When he wrote that the unconscious is structured like a language, he

1 Talk delivered to the Lacan Circle of Australia on 05/03/2023.

2 J.-A. Miller, 'Elements of Epistemology', in *Lacan and Science*, eds. J. Glynos and Y. Stavrakakis (London: Karnac, 2002), 156-7.

3 B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1946), 25.

4 J. Lacan, 'Science and Truth', *Ecrits*, trans. B. Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 727 & 729.

5 J.-A. Miller, 'The Pass of Psychoanalysis toward Science: The Desire for Knowledge', *The Lacanian Review*, no. 7 (2019), 75.

6 'The Pass of Psychoanalysis', 75.

7 J.-A. Miller, 'Elements', 155.

8 A. Zenoni, 'A Post-Scientific Real', *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, no. 27 (2013), 82.

implied that there are laws in the real of the unconscious. Thus, one might say that science created the conditions that psychoanalysis appropriated for a reading of the unconscious. Lacan would come to take issue with this position, however. Eventually he would say that there is no knowledge in the real. Much later, he would add that the effects of science will affect this real, as we will see later.

Jacques-Alain Miller recognises a second period in Lacan's thinking in relation to science. It concerns a lecture, *Italian Note*, which was part of a series of seminars Lacan gave in Italy and is brought together in the collection, *Lacan en Italie*.⁹ Here, Lacan refers to those effects of science that produce discontent and anguish. Daniel Roy mentions two of these effects in the argument for the 2023 NLS Congress: science produces *immonde*/filth or waste, and it transforms the object *a* into an object of jouissance or consumption.¹⁰ Science was a crucial point of reference for Lacan for a long time. Even as late as *Position of the Unconscious* he says that, 'For science, the cogito marks ... the break with every assurance conditioned by intuition'.¹¹ Indeed, Lacan was not in favour of intuition. However, we must also say that he always insisted on the difference between the principles of universality of science on the one hand, and the principles of the one-by-one approach and of the singularity of the body of the subject in psychoanalysis, on the other.

Later the compass of science would be replaced by art.¹² In the first lesson of *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan says that science relies on the idea of the model—he refers to Lord Kelvin here, a mathematical physicist who calculated the first laws of thermodynamics—to gain access to the real. We thus resort to the imaginary to form an idea of it. In other words, there is a delusional aspect to science.¹³ Then, in the fourth lesson he

says: 'I try to say that art is beyond the symbolic. Art is a kind of know-how, the symbolic is at the heart of creating. I believe there is more truth in the saying that is art than in any amount of blah-blah.'¹⁴

Art and Psychoanalysis

Art shows us that we don't need to be nostalgic. It exposes a world of crises, upheavals, events, instances.¹⁵ Something here operates beyond representation and thus beyond time. This is reflected in the development of Lacan's work.¹⁶ He started off with an emphasis on temporality following the logic of the instance of seeing, the time for understanding and the moment to conclude, whilst in the latter part of his work he concentrates on space, via topology and the manipulation of surfaces.¹⁷ This emphasis on space is not without a relationship to time, however; in the ultra-short session—which is nothing more than an encounter—time becomes compressed into a series of instances.¹⁸ As such, analysis developed into an event, an event of the body, thereby aiming at the singularity of the body of the analysand.

Art is also resolutely singular whilst nevertheless being of universal value. Art contains something that belongs to the singularity of the artist whilst, of course, being a common object that can function on the market of exchange value. Picasso is known to have once said that he only ever painted one painting.¹⁹ If this were the case, he is saying that every painting that he painted had left him with a residue, something unfinished which he then tried to finish with the next painting and the next one, and so on.²⁰ In other words, Picasso was saying that painting is his *sinthome*; each painting tries to reach the singular core of the real of his life and body.²¹ This is what Lacan refers to as the One of the body. Painting, one might say, was Picasso's attempt to establish a rela-

9 J.-A. Miller, 'The Pass of Psychoanalysis', 76.

10 D. Roy, 'Discontent and Anxiety in the Clinic and in Civilization', Argument for the NLS Congress, 2023.

11 J. Lacan, 'Position of the Unconscious', *Ecrits*, trans. B. Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 705.

12 J.-A. Miller, 'The Real is Without Law', *Lacanian Ink*, no. 47 (2016), 67.

13 J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIV, 1976-1977, L'Insu que sait de l'une bevue, s'aile a mourre*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. D. Collins, unpublished, lesson of 16/11/1076.

14 L'Insu, lesson of 18/01/1977.

15 R. Loose, 'Art and Psychoanalysis Beyond (Lack-of) Being', *The Lacanian Review*, no. 9 (2020), 225.

16 'Art and Psychoanalysis', 225.

17 J. Demuyne, 'De Esthetiek van het Singuliere, een Commentaar', *Via Lacan*, no. 3 (2018), 172.

18 'De Esthetiek', 172.

19 F.-H. Freda, 'The Artist', congressamp2014.com.

20 R. Loose, 'Art and Psychoanalysis', 226.

21 'Art and Psychoanalysis', 226.

tion between the singular real of his body and the social bond.²² In the process of painting the same painting, by failing to fully realise the picture, Picasso became an artist. I would say that the most interesting modern art invites the viewer to experience the inherent failure of language in the subject and his or her body and that the singularity of this failure can be transmitted such that it has a value beyond its own *ex-sistence* in that it can touch, disturb, and affect other people.²³

Modern art concerns the touching of something real in the human being and that is what it shares with psychoanalysis. Both bring singularities to the fore beyond the field of being (being here in the ontological sense). Both share a sense of failure in that they form an attempt to establish a relationship between the singular real of the body, the One of the body, and the social bond which is an attempt that fails. This is the reason for the artist that he or she remains creative, whilst analysis finds a limit here—an end—with the *sinthome* or the pass. For the artist this creativity cannot be explained and for the analysis the signifier encounters the letter on the rim with the real beyond meaning. This separates art and psychoanalysis from science, which is not based on failure and limit. What art and psychoanalysis have in common is that they reject the attempt to exclude the singular from a standardising and homogenizing modern life.

The Heavenly Object Falls back to Earth

Daniel Roy has written that there are moments and places of anxiety when the speaking being is brought back to his body and fails to inscribe himself in a world that we imagine as a world that would be the same for all animals.²⁴ Suddenly the ability to show oneself with an organised body is under threat for the speaking being in this world, because this world itself has become an *immonde*, a world of filth.²⁵

This point is not simple. Just before this passage Roy mentioned that anxiety emerges in the moments

and places where our body is affected because this body, being organised, must emerge in the real and still maintain its form.²⁶ To maintain the form of one's body is not always evident; for example, it can happen that someone takes certain drugs and suddenly the relation to the body loses its form and suddenly the world becomes weird. (Is it not the case that for a coherent world one needs a coherent body?) Roy also refers to kids who suddenly cannot go to school anymore because school is a different world for them, and these then are moments and places in which the body of the speaking being manifests itself as heterogenous to its environment and to the social group.²⁷ We are not animals who are naturally adapted to the environment. Language affects and parasites our bodies. This body is heterogenous and when something confronts the subject that brings this to the fore (think about driving a car and suddenly having to join a motorway), panic may ensue.

The body can also become heterogenous to its status as consumer and become so overwhelmed by waste that it has no place anymore and disappears into that waste. The world becomes weird—*immonde*—here. Lacan's neologism *immonde* refers to a kind of not-world, a world that is quite different from a utopia.²⁸ It also refers to the rejected object *a*, to filth and to waste. This object *a* is that in which our jouissance is concentrated. In an analysis, this object can fall away from the jouissance of the drive and as such make room for desire. However, there is also a threat that we become overwhelmed by false objects, consumer objects, gadgets available on the free market. I will return to this.

From Heaven to Waste

Back to *immonde*, filth and waste. For this next section I am indebted to a text by Geert Hoorneart called *Act for Climate*.²⁹ Aspects of this text in English appeared recently in a book called *Returning to Lacan's Seminar XVII*.³⁰ I am going to mention a few points from this article, as well as some made by

22 'Art and Psychoanalysis', 226.

23 'Art and Psychoanalysis', 226.

24 D. Roy, 'Discontent and Anxiety'.

25 'Discontent and Anxiety'.

26 'Discontent and Anxiety'.

27 'Discontent and Anxiety'.

28 J. Lacan, 'The Third', trans. P. Dravers, *The Lacanian Review*, no. 7 (2019), 104.

29 G. Hoorneart, 'Act for Climate: Lacan en het Flesje Pellegrino', *Via Lacan*, no. 5 (2020), 131-41.

30 R. Litten and C. Wright (eds.), *Returning to Lacan's Seminar XVII* (New York: Lacanian Press, 2022).

Lacan (published in *Lacan en Italie*).³¹ In one of his Italian talks, Lacan says that we need psychoanalysts more than ever, which is a comment that is worth exploring.³² Hoorneart refers to a theme that runs throughout Lacan's work, namely, heaven.³³ Newton removed God from heaven and replaced him with the numbers and letters of science (mathematical physics) supposing that there is knowledge in the real. He did this by studying the stars, the sun, and the moon. Heaven became the first place for the acquisition of knowledge.³⁴ This, according to Lacan, would have its effects on Earth. Lacan says that we need analysts because we have been invaded by a proliferation of the real as impossible as the real of science multiplies itself with the fabrication of apparatuses that begin to dominate us, and which eventually become impossible to bear.³⁵ These will come to crush and suffocate us; for Lacan, humankind is corroded by the real.³⁶ There are two implicit points here:

1. Anxiety is increased by the products of science and industry
2. Something comes from heaven and has fallen to Earth.

What is it, exactly, that falls from heaven? In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud writes that science has to some extent managed to master nature, but it has not made people happier; science affects nature but not the subject.³⁷ There is a disjunction between science and the human psyche. I will also return to this, but first we go back to the origins of modern science.

Lacan learned from Alexandre Koyré that modern science originated from heaven.³⁸ It began with calculating the stars in the sky that always return to the same place. So, the laws of science are based on laws that apply to heaven. Lacan wondered: is it not bizarre that the human being was primarily interested in heaven? He could have shown an interest in Earth

instead.³⁹ By heaven he meant the place where everything returns to its place, and from which the human was able to acquire knowledge. The idea behind this idea of acquiring knowledge from heaven was that the heavenly objects demonstrated a trajectory that was undisturbed, and this allowed for the development of formulas and predictable knowledge that could be written down. The question is: does this apply to humans who stalk the earth? Indeed, stars in the sky never lie and they do not commit errors, but humans do, all the time.

Knowledge is based on an unlimited universe, and when applied to Earth and humans, it encounters limits. For example, as Lacan says, on Earth the sexual relation cannot be logically written, which is why love only ends up in waffle, misunderstanding and nonsense.⁴⁰ There is a limit there for human experience; Earth itself is not unlimited like the universe is, and yet we extract materials from it as if they are unlimited in supply. We also add objects to it. The laws of the universe perform not so well on Earth, and it is this fact that causes anguish and discontent. Can we rely on science? The problem with science is that it is based on an undisturbed repetition in the real which, again, allows it to develop the kind of formulas that require constancy. These laws are impotent with regard to that other real, namely, the real of human experience that causes anxiety, an anxiety which the realistic real of the *immonde*, the world of accumulating objects and gadgets, exacerbates.⁴¹

With this realistic real we have entered the Anthropocene in which Earth has irrevocably changed by the effects of science. In one of his Italian talks, Lacan says that even our scientists have become anxious.⁴² Why does Lacan suggest that analysis is what we need most? My sense is that analysis does not want to adapt the subject to the real in the hope of creating some kind of harmony. This hope fails,

31 'J. Lacan, *Lacan en Italie/Lacan en Italia, 1953-1978* (Milan: La Salamandre, 1978).

32 J. Lacan, 'Alla Scuola Freudiana, 1974', in *Lacan en Italie 1953-1978* (Milan: La Salamandre 1978), 100.

33 G. Hoorneart, 'Act for Climate', 131.

34 'Act for Climate', 131

35 J. Lacan 'Alla Scuola Freudiana, 1974', 100

36 'Alla Scuola Freudiana, 1974', 101.

37 S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Standard Edition*, 21(1930): 87-88.

38 See Lacan's comments on this in 'In Memory of Ernest Jones: On his Theory of Symbolism', *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), espec. fn. 20, p. 596.

39 J. Lacan, 'Alla Scuola Freudiana, 1974', 100.

40 J. Lacan, 'Alla Scuola Freudiana, 1974', 106.

41 D. Roy, 'Discontent and Anxiety'.

42 J. Lacan, 'The Third', 93.

which leads to an endless repetition. This repetition is nothing other than an endless search for truth which never arrives because truth is fictive, and the meaning-producing aspect of the signifier is the only thing that can catch it. The real is outside sense and discourse. There is commensurability between the scientific laws based on the endless universe and language conceived as an endless meaning-producing apparatus, as opposed to language understood as something that contains a hole and thus a limit. The orientation of psychoanalysis concerns a real that forms a limit and that is the singular real of the analysand at the end of analysis when the letter, articulated as littoral between language and real, can border this real. This reduces the pressure for an endless search for meaning.

Objects as Ready-Mades for our Desire for Jouissance

The object *a* is a castrated or extracted object which concentrates, as we said, jouissance—albeit in a limited way. This limitation of jouissance is the cause of desire. Let us now return to Roy's argument from the 2023 NLS congress. Then, he wrote that a new destiny has been added to the fate of the drives through the introduction into the world of fake, 'more-to-be-enjoyed', objects—that is to say, gadgets. We don't know whether these are good or bad but, as Roy says, we can be sure they will become part of our discontent in civilization.⁴³ These objects—computers, video games, smart phones, etc.—become connected to our bodies, forging a new connection between body and language. We must not forget that all these objects are the result of a scientific knowledge grounded in language, of a knowledge in the real, that has clear, even material, effects that accumulate, as we said before, in the world. However, there is also another aspect to our discontent in civilization.

In *The Third*, Lacan wonders whether these gadgets will come to dominate and adds that we will not reach a point in which gadgets are not symptoms.⁴⁴ This is a particularly important remark. My reading is as follows. Lacan implies that gadgets and symptoms overlap but in doing so he also implies a difference. We love gadgets because they provide

satisfaction and they have the capacity to charm us. Their increasing supply on the free market leads to an increase in demand. Do symptoms provide satisfaction? Would symptoms do well on the free market as objects of satisfaction and pleasure? No. They are by no means charming. Symptoms contain jouissance but not pleasure nor satisfaction at the level of conscious experience. In fact, the symptom can be enormously burdensome, and it is for that reason that a patient goes into analysis. In other words, it is the response of the subject to anxiety, which itself is caused by the real. The symptom is a parasite, and when Lacan says that gadgets will function as symptoms, part of his meaning is that gadgets, too, will function as parasites for us.

Gadgets have the power to free a jouissance contained within the Other and it is this freed-up jouissance that causes anxiety. It is a paradox in that we make gadgets for our comfort, yet they cause anxiety because they come to overwhelm us. That is why symptoms and gadgets are, to a certain extent, commensurate with each other. How do we end up responding to this? To calm ourselves down, we usually turn to even more gadgets—a fact that suits the free market very well. Of course, psychoanalysis proposes a different path.

Lacan says to his Italian audience: 'The exploitation of desire is the big invention of the discourse of capitalism. I have to say this is a highly successful trick. That we would arrive at the industrialisation of desire, it cannot be improved on, to calm people down.'⁴⁵ In *The Third* he says: 'We have made some progress ... but what did science give us? It gave us plenty to sink our teeth into in the place of that which is missing in our relationship to knowledge (*connaissance*), which, for most people, comes down to gadgets—television and trips to the moon.'⁴⁶ The fact that we will never master 'all' of knowledge, Lacan implies in this passage, can cause anxiety and discontent. Gadgets tend to plug this hole.

In Seminar XVII, Lacan makes reference to the small objects *a* that are found everywhere; objects that were designed by science. He says: 'think of them as *lathouses*,' and he adds: 'It is certain that, if they exist, anxiety, as it is that what we are dealing with

43 D. Roy, 'Discontent and Anxiety'.

44 J. Lacan, 'The Third', 108.

45 J. Lacan, 'Excursus', in *Lacan en Italie 1953-1978* (Milan: La Salamandre 1978).

46 J. Lacan, 'The Third', 108.

here, is not without object. ... A better approach to the *lathouse* would calm us a little.⁴⁷ We will come back to what it might be that could calm us but first, what is a *lathouse*? It is a neologism that has its roots in ancient philosophy but for Lacan, the term designates objects produced by science and set free on the free market where they can proliferate. With this we have arrived back at a previous point, namely, that we developed modern science based on a lack of limit. This lack of limitation led to an inundation of objects, which in turn had consequences for anxiety, discontent, and the social bond.

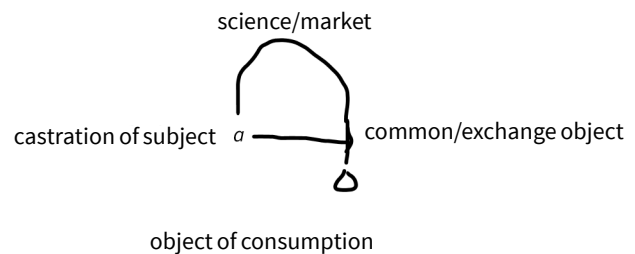
In lesson VII of his seminar X on anxiety, Lacan predicted a kind of loyalty between science and the market. There he spoke about objects of exchange, objects that are fabricated and so can be shared.⁴⁸ He then indicates that there is another object that cannot be exchanged or shared, the object *a*.⁴⁹ Lacan wonders how this localisable object, this object of exchange, can be transformed into a kind of private, incommunicable, object, i.e., the object that is correlative to our fantasy, the object *a*, against which our fantasy protects us, precisely because it is the not-without-an-object of anxiety.⁵⁰

It is at this point that Lacan allows the sociological function of the phallus to head the parade. Why is this un-Lacanian reference to sociology appropriate here? Indeed, Miller uses it as an index to divide the chapter into themes. He uses it, it seems to me, to indicate that for us to remain a civilized society, we must allow ourselves our castration. We must become the bearer of the symbolic phallus in order to be able to participate in the movement of exchange. Simply put, if one is not the bearer of the symbolic phallus—that is to say, not castrated—there is no lack, and thus no desire, for example, to exchange. Then Lacan says something funny which should not distract us from the serious point he is making in this chapter. He indicates that there is another object produced by castration (one that is not the object *a*). Mum says to Little Hans, ‘I’ll snip it off.’ In that event, ‘where will the little *Wiwimacher*, as Little Hans calls it, be? (...) in the

operational field of the common exchangeable object, it would be there in the hands of the one who has cut it off, and that is precisely what would be uncanny about the situation.⁵¹ From this point onwards, this object can be traded with; it has become a common object, one that can acquire the status of belonging to this or that person. There are objects you can share and those you cannot. Those that cannot be shared are, for example, the turd and the nipple.⁵² With this Lacan indicates that these objects that precede the common, socialized, objects are the objects of the drive, in other words, the object *a*. Symbolic castration produces two things:

1. the pre-condition for exchange, i.e., the object as cause of desire;
2. a common object that conditions the possibilities for exchange.

So, there can be no objects of value, exchange, or consumption, without the precondition of the object *a*. We can now pose the following question: how was it possible that the consumable object came to be superimposed on the object *a*? We can represent it like this:



This superimposition happened because of the close collaboration between science and the free market that Miller refers to in *The Real in the 21st Century* where he refers to ‘a great disorder in the real.’⁵³ The implication is that this disorder, generated by the collaboration between science and the market, could have profound consequences for our lives and may well lead to an increase in violence, hatred, and segregation. Master signifiers no longer provide anchoring points and what dominates our

47 J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), 162-163.

48 J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety, 1962-1963*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 88 & 91.

49 *Anxiety*, p. 91.

50 *Anxiety*, p. 88.

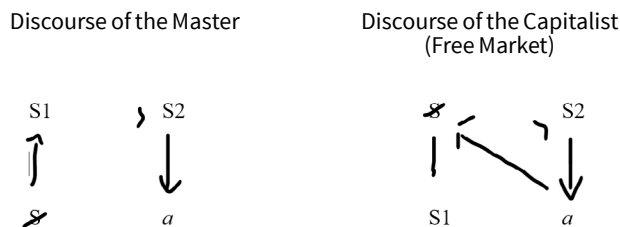
51 *Anxiety*, p. 90.

52 *Anxiety*, p. 91.

53 J.-A. Miller, ‘The Real in the 21st Century’, *Hurly-Burly* no. 9 (2013), 200.

culture is a swarm of master-signifiers in the form of the objects of consumption and charm. This collaboration between science and markets screams for these multiple master-signifiers to become increasingly innovative. Everything now has a solution and if it does not work, the promise is that another one will become available. This structure creates consumers, and it reels them in by making them believe that their division is a consequence of a lack in the world and thus that a free market on which, potentially, everything is available, is the only solution. How does that work?

In 1972, Lacan referred to an inversion of the left antipode in the discourse of the master, which produces the discourse of the capitalist.⁵⁴ We might also call this the discourse of the free market. If you invert the left antipode of the discourse of the master, you can see that it is no longer the master who is in charge, but the subject. Here are the two discourses:



In the discourse of the free market, one is master in one's own home. This master/subject appeals to an *S1*—not in the place of agent, but in the place of truth. This means that the subject demands a truth in the form of external solutions, *S1*'s (*essaims*), a veritable swarm of Ones (fixes or solutions), of which there are a great many on offer on the free market. From these it is expected that they will produce knowledge, *S2*. This in turn will set the subject onto the path of *jouissance* by pushing him or her in the direction of *a*. This push towards the object *a* of *jouissance* is driven by the 'knowledge' of the market (*S2*) that promises that *jouissance* can reach a satisfactory - if not ideal - level. This knowledge works like a treat as it masks the fact that the object *a* is only available for the speaking being in the form of a surplus *jouissance* (*plus-de-jouir*), i.e., there will always be a remainder *qua* *jouissance* or satisfaction. The market encourages the *speaking being* to keep pursuing *jouissance* by flooding this market with objects that pretend that more *jouissance* is always readily available. This

drive by the market to pursue *jouissance* overwhelms the subject in a loop that is continuous and will ride roughshod over subjective division, castration and lack. In other words, the promise by the market is that everything is knowable, possible, enjoyable and satisfiable. The subject of this market is fooled into thinking that he or she does not need to be impotent any more in terms of reaching and maintaining an ideal level of *jouissance*. Trying to reach this ideal level of *jouissance* concerns the attempt at unifying the ideal (*S1*), with *a* (as object of *jouissance*). The unification of the ideal with *a* is what characterises hypnosis (considered from a Lacanian point of view) and encourages the enslavement of the subject.

You can see the impotence regarding this unification attempt in the discourse of the master, which incidentally is also the discourse of the constitution of the subject of the unconscious. This unification is impotent here because the chain of signifiers produces a remainder, *a*, which is impossible to retrieve and thus causes desire. However, the discourse of the free market promises that this retraction has become possible via the relay of the subject because it is, of course, only for—and thus via—the subject that the ideal and *jouissance* can be united. The unification between the ideal and the object *a* has left no room for desire, the latter having submerged in the promise of *jouissance*, and it remains at the level of promise because something has its ideal *jouissance*-value only in the form of a mirage on the horizon. Indeed, as soon as it is in one's reach, it turns out not to be what one thought one wanted. It has lost its magic. The result is that we end up with what ultimately can only become waste. We thus find ourselves in a continuous loop because we do want to be charmed and fulfilled, and we are assured by the market that this is possible, providing, of course, that you pay for it.

With this we are back with the *lathouses*, objects of *jouissance*. All these objects are standard objects; they are 'ready-mades' for our desire, and they cater for an immediate satisfaction that is never fulfilling. The nature of these objects is such that they do not cause desire, but one enjoys them, at least a little, and one is enjoyed by them, and they exclude the Other. I call this addiction. In pornography, for example, which is often an addiction, science, technology, and the market work together very well to produce a standardised mode of sexual *jouissance*.

⁵⁴ J. Lacan, 'Du discours psychanalytique', in *Lacan en Italie 1953-1978* (Milan: La Salamandre 1978)

Our culture encourages us to obfuscate lack by feeding the scopophilic and other drives with images and objects that promise a more-to-be-enjoyed. One analyst who was addicted to porn once said the following: 'you don't quite get what will do it for you with each image, but you keep going because each image suggests that you will get it with the next one.' This goes to the heart of addiction.

What transforms the object *a* into a *lathouse*? First, science tries to master the real by making it visible—disparate examples include fMRI, porn and cultures of transparency and evaluation—but obfuscates that real through an over-production of those jouissance-producing objects and gadgets we cannot get enough of. In addition to this, the market is extraordinarily successful in exploiting the subject who has problems by encouraging *addictifying* answers that are based on the legitimising of a solution for a problem that is situated outside the responsibility of the subject, but which also promises a harmonisation with the real.

Conclusion

We are falling asleep, and we need to wake up. How? We need the desire of the analyst, and this desire is not the desire to bulldoze the real with object like gadgets.⁵⁵ These solutions may be based on real jouissance-effects but they function entirely within the register of the imaginary; they function as a mimicking of the real without ever creating the possibility of a passage to it. We can only change the subject's relation to the real by producing a lasting effect.⁵⁶

The desire of the analyst is not what Lacan refers to as the *sinthomasaquinas* in Seminar XXIII.⁵⁷ One aspect in this play on words is Saint Thomas of Aquinas, a Jesuit, and enormous influence on Joyce, who insisted on clarity and beauty. Clarity and beauty do not help us anymore. The psychoanalytic act aims at the real beyond these, but also beyond meaning and truth. All of these have protected us against the real, but they have lost their traction.

Instead, Lacan proposes the *sint'home rule*.⁵⁸ This is a singular choice by the subject for dealing with the real, related to the legislative power of language.

We cannot do without language nor without the social bond that depends on it. What does the suffering of the subject of modernity teach us? That modern solutions are ravaging the subject, the body, and the social bond. So, what is the desire of the analyst in modern times? To be the kind of saint who does not want to be one. Someone who does not enjoy his or her status, nor the psychoanalytic act, but who is someone who can incarnate the object-waste. Why do we need analysts more than ever? Functioning as a waste-object can induce anxiety and shame, and as such, analysts can arrest an unashamed pursuit of jouissance, thereby re-establishing a bond with the Other and thus creating room for desire.

55 R. Loose, 'The Hijacking of the Symptom and the Addictification of Society', *Subjectivity*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2015), 177.

56 Hijacking, 177.

57 J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII, The Sinthome, 1975-1976*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 6.

58 *The Sinthome*, 6.

Psychoanalysis and literature

The riskiest moment: Kafka and Freud

Mladen Dolar

In the beginning there is an awakening. Many of Kafka's novels and stories begin with the moment of waking up. One awakes, but what does one awake to? One is dragged out of slumber and dreams, suddenly required to confront reality—but what reality?

The Trial famously begins with an awakening. Josef K. wakes up in his room, but the maid hasn't appeared with his breakfast. Instead, a stranger answers his call, and there is another one, popping up at his bedside, in the midst of his homely intimacy. The two intruders will then proceed to eat his breakfast, they will seize his undergarments and present him with the indictment. He has been charged, and from this moment on, his life will turn into a nightmare. Josef K. has gone to bed innocent, but he has awoken to be charged, with no chance of exculpation. In the first scene, on the edge of waking up at home, the home is suddenly 'de-homed'; the Freudian concept of *Unheimlich*, of the uncanny, the unhomely, is quite literally staged. Awakening is a threshold between sleep and wakefulness, like coming back from a foreign country, but there is a risk lurking at the threshold, for does one ever simply come back home from such a distant oneiric place? Can one return home after awakening? There is a crack in between, and the uncanny moment is precisely the moment

of not being quite able to find the homely again, just for a moment. In a passage which he eventually crossed out from the manuscript (one can find it in the Appendix in most editions), Kafka put it brilliantly:

The strange thing is that when one wakes up in the morning, one generally finds things in the same places they were the previous evening. And yet in sleep and in dreams one finds oneself, at least apparently, in a state fundamentally different from wakefulness, and upon opening one's eyes an infinite presence of mind is required, or rather quickness of wit, in order to catch everything, so to speak, in the same place one left it the evening before.¹

There is a thin line: on the one hand there is the dislocation of dreams, one has traveled far away in one's dreams and visited the distant fantasy worlds, on the other hand there is the familiar, but the familiar elusively escapes once one comes back from this journey; there is the impossibility of placing it, one needs vigilance to catch it, to prevent it from sliding away, for its strangeness strangely coincides with everything being seemingly in the same place. It is like the homely world has been dislocated by the dream and has to be relocated when one wakes up; it has to

1 *Der Process*, ed. Malcolm Pasley, *Kritische Ausgabe*, Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1990, p. 168. I must point out the brilliant book by Roberto Calasso, *K.*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, which gives an extended analysis of this.

be moved in order to return to the same place. If awakening is a threshold, then it is a threshold where for a moment the relation between the subject and the world wavers. “Waking up is the riskiest moment [*der riskanteste Augenblick*]. If you manage to get through it without being dragged out of place, you can relax for the rest of the day.” (Ibid.) So how can one survive the awakening and circumvent this highest risk?

What is the story of Josef K.? He is a man who has faltered on this brink, and he will never be able to relax again—not on this day or on any of the following, not till his last day on the last page. He will be stuck in-between, no longer asleep but not yet quite awake, and the whole novel will unfold in this in-between state, on this edge. His protracted wakefulness with which he will struggle throughout the novel, to the point of utmost exhaustion, appears to coincide with a protracted dream—but this is not a good way to put it: it coincides not with the dream, but rather with something that emerged at the edge of awakening and which is no longer a dream, but it is not yet the familiar and constituted reality in which one can find one’s bearings. There is a tiny lag in between, emerging for a moment on the edge. Kafka’s guideline could be stated in these terms: “Don’t give up on the edge”, on the edge of what is neither the dream nor reality, but the impossible in-between where a dream-like real infringes upon the familiar reality. It all seems like a slip, a tiny lack of vigilance. K. says to his landlady, Mrs. Grubach:

I was caught unawares [*überrumpelt*], that’s all. If immediately upon awakening, without letting myself be thrown off by the fact that Anna hadn’t appeared, I’d risen immediately and, ignoring anyone in my path, had come to you and eaten breakfast in the kitchen for a change, if I’d had you bring my clothes from my room, in short if I had behaved reasonably, nothing else would have happened. Everything that wanted to come into being [*alles was werden wollte*] would have been stifled. (33)

He was caught off guard in a reckless moment. He should have reasonably ignored the crack into which the two guards have slipped with their indictment. This is the crucial formulation: something wanted to come into being, *werden wollte*, and it could have been stifled if he had reacted in good time, if he had seized the possession of his senses

on time, but he didn’t. There was something like a momentary deficiency which enabled the impossible edge to invade everything else. “We are so poorly prepared,” says Josef K., echoing Hamlet. “At the bank, for example, I am prepared, nothing like this could ever happen to me there.” (33) When he is awake and when he is occupying his post, when he exerts power from his social position, he is well equipped and could fend off any such intrusion.

The tiny lack of vigilance on Josef K.’s part provides the tiny opening for Kafka’s relentless vigilance; he will not give way, he will persevere on this edge to the terrible end. Awakening is the riskiest moment, says Kafka, and if one lets one’s vigilance slip even stranger things can happen: one can wake up as an insect, for example. Gregor Samsa, in *Metamorphosis*, lacked the quickness of wit to catch everything in the same place when he woke up; he didn’t find his own body, he mislaid it for a moment. Awakening is metamorphosis, there is a *Verwandlung* lurking in every awakening.

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. . . . What happened to me? he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, only rather too small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. (89)

This awakening precedes and prefigures Josef K.’s. The story was written in late 1912, immediately before *The Trial*, and there we find, like the preview of the crossed-out passage in *The Trial*, the escaping familiarity that one cannot take hold of, the “it was no dream,” and the curious word *Menschenzimmer*, “the human room,” *ein richtiges*, the “regular”, the true, the proper human abode is made inhuman on the stroke of the awakening, at the hour of the riskiest moment.

On the first page of *The Castle* the land surveyor K. arrives at the village at the foot of the castle in the late evening. He calls at the inn to spend the night and since there is no room they put him up in the taproom.

Several of the local rustics were still sitting over their beer, but he didn’t feel like talking to anyone. He fetched the straw mattress down from the attic himself, and lay down near the stove. It was warm, the locals were silent, his weary eyes gave them a cursory inspection, and then he fell asleep. But soon afterwards

he was woken again. A young man in town clothes, with a face like an actor's—narrowed eyes, strongly marked eyebrows—was standing beside him. (Oxford World Classics, p. 5)

The young man would then claim that one needed permission from the castle authorities if one wanted to spend the night there. There is immediately commotion and argument. Everything starts with an awakening, after just two paragraphs, and K. wakes up caught in this middle region between wakefulness and sleep.

Another example. In one of Kafka's most striking and bewildering stories, "The Burrow" (*Der Bau*), we have an animal, a "badger" in the middle of a convoluted burrow.² The animal has built his burrow as his underground castle, protected against all possible enemies. He has carefully considered all eventualities and thoroughly pondered possible strategies of all imaginable enemies. So, he sits there in the middle of his formidable fortification, anxiously waiting in a state of permanent vigilance. I have been hitherto citing only the first pages, but in "The Burrow" the awakening appears in the precise middle of the story. For, one day, there is a moment when everything is shattered, and it all starts with waking up.

I must have slept for a long time. I was only wakened when I had reached the last light sleep which dissolves of itself, and it must have been very light, for it was an almost inaudible whistling noise [*ein an sich kaum hörbares Zischen*] that wakened me. ... This noise was a comparatively innocent one; I didn't hear it at all at first, although it must certainly have been there; I must first feel quite at home before I could hear it; it is, so to speak, audible only to the ear of the householder. And it is not even constant, as such noises usually are; there are long pauses, obviously caused by stoppages of the current of air. ... I don't seem to be getting

any nearer to the place where the noise is, it goes on always on the same thin note, with regular pauses, now a sort of whistling, but again like a kind of piping.³

It is from this thin line between sleep and awakening that the tiny noise is heard. It is a slight outer disturbance that wakes him up, though it might be just a continuation of sleep or just a noise in the head, insistent and obtrusive as it is. It is born on that thin line which seems to have produced it, it comes from in-between the two worlds, wakefulness and sleep, and it resides in the passage between the outer and the inner, the carefully protected internal and the intruding external, on the threshold. It materializes the crack between the two as a barely audible sound. And the supposed emitter of this noise, this elusive purely acoustic creature, this nothing at all, not even a voice but a tiny whistling, this unfathomable entity will invade the poor badger's life; it will dismantle his burrow and turn his life into a nightmare. The intruder will surreptitiously infiltrate all his elaborate fortifications and undo all his meticulous planning. This sound is unplaceable, it's just like a tiny crack in being, but it is enough to become overwhelming and unstoppable. The forceful beauty and elegance of this story is that it elaborates the absolutely minimum that emerges on the threshold.

On the edge of waking

I would like to open a parenthesis here and consider for a moment the eerie and mysterious nature of sound in relation to waking up. Michel Chion opens his magisterial book on sound⁴—the best book on sound I know of—exactly on this edge, using a topos of classical literature. *Iphigénie*, a classical tragedy by Racine from 1674, opens with these words: "*Oui, c'est Agamemnon, c'est ton roi qui t'éveille; / Viens, reconnais la voix qui frappe ton oreille.*" "Yes, this is Agamemnon, your king who is waking you up; / Recognize the voice which is pounding into your ear."

2 One can add two curious anecdotic indications. Kafka was not Lacan's author; to my knowledge Lacan never mentions him in any of the published works. Yet in one of his unpublished seminars (*Identification*, 21 March 1962) he takes up precisely this story at some length and develops it into a strange Kafkaesque parable of his own, claiming that 'the man is the animal of the burrow' and that this is the clue to the strange topology that links the subject and the Other. Kafka was not Heidegger's author either, to say the least. Yet, I learned from a conversation with Giorgio Agamben that he once in his young days confronted Heidegger himself with this silence on Kafka, and Heidegger, according to this hearsay evidence, engaged in a passionate discussion of just one story, precisely "The Burrow". There was no tape recorder, one desperately wishes there had been. One might well wonder about this strange hidden burrow of modern theoretical endeavours.

3 *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 343-4.

4 Michel Chion, *Le Son* (Paris: Nathan, 1998); *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise*, trans. James A. Steintrager (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

As the curtain goes up it is dawn and Agamemnon is waking his servant, Arcas. Chion comments: "The sound of this voice seems to be coming from Arcas's dream while at the same time it is pulling him out of it." (p. 5) The curtain rises in the middle of waking up, the audience is awoken along with the sleeper; the king's voice is like a sequel to the voice in the dreams, the beginning is missed and only recuperated from the other side of the edge. "So it is in the nature of the sound to be frequently associated with something lost, missed and at the same time captured, still being there." (Ibid.)

This opening—of the book on sound, of Racine's play, of Kafka's novels—has a tenacious and internal link with the question of the nature of sound. Why does one wake up? Quite trivially and commonly, one is awoken by a sound, by a noise, by a voice, something that has become too loud and disturbing. The sound intrusion may have been first integrated into the dream, but when it becomes too noisy, one has to wake up; it can no longer be contained. So, there is a connection, in most common experience, between this space separating sleep and wakefulness and the very nature of sound. The sound has been going on for some length of time during sleep. Then, it provokes its break and continues after the awakening, the first thing one is aware of when coming to one's senses and the first thing one has to figure out is this sound. The sound displays its nature in a particularly telling way, precisely on this line of demarcation, and this paradoxically blurred line is epitomized, in a most telling way, by the nature of the sound. It belongs to two worlds, it embodies the break between the two, and in that break something comes up for a moment, between the sound integrated into the dream and the sound of reality that one wakes up to; there is a sound unheard, one cannot quite grasp it from either side.

The thin line presented by the sound invokes a moment of phantasmagoria. One cannot be quite certain whether it may be a delusion. Kafka's badger, desperately looking for the receding source of the sound, is placed in this dilemma:

Sometimes I think that nobody but myself would hear it; it is true, I hear it now more and more distinctly, for my ear has grown keener through practice; though in reality it is exactly the same noise wherever I may hear it, as I have convinced myself by comparing my impressions. (345)

There is an eerie quality lurking in every sound, but coming to the fore at the moment of awakening—can it be that only I can hear it? Does it have an "objective" status at all? Is it in my head or does it come from outside? Its spatial location poses the problem of whether there is a spatial location at all. There is a moment of phantasmagoria when the sound wavers, if ever so minimally, between its reality and unreality. One has to make sound tests to ascertain that this is indeed a sound to be located outside and not a sound imagined or dreamed up. As the badger was just awakening from light slumber, this may be a strange continuation of a dream that refuses to be dissipated. The sound is a test – of being awake, alert and conscious, of being in possession of one's senses – but is one ever? The ability to locate the sound is like the test of sanity, for if one can't locate it, one stands on the brink of delusion, hearing voices, incapacity to make sense of the world at large. One stands on the verge of an abyss, with the tiny sound that won't go away and resists being assigned a place and a cause. It is like an interminable prolongation of the vacillation inherent in every sound, and in every awakening. This is a vacillation of the divide into consciousness and the world, the most dramatic of all divides. What/where/how does one hear? The sound pierces inside, immediately and unstoppably, and directly poses the question of an outside and its status, entailing a structural moment of indecision, at the very edge of the physical and the psychic as the paramount inside/outside divide. The assumption of the reality of an outside discriminates between sanity and insanity. It places the hearer, the dreamer, the waker in an undecidable zone of a possible delusion. In "The Burrow", not quite the last, but the penultimate story Kafka wrote (in winter 1923-4, ten years after *The Trial*), he brought the logic of the awakening to the absolute minimal, the tiniest possible sound to which this strange temporality and causality of awakening is now reduced. The sound of a crack, of an opening.

Before leaving Kafka, let me just briefly point out that there is also a counterpoint in his work to what we have been discussing. Both Josef K. and the land surveyor K. struggle very hard, throughout both novels, to keep awake. They are traversed by the opposing forces of insomnia, terrible wakefulness against one's will, and sleepiness, the temptation to nod off, for they are both constantly tired to death. I will recall only one crucial moment when K., towards

the end of *The Castle*, bursts into the bedroom of Bürgel, one of the castle's secretaries, in the middle of the night. Bürgel goes into a long rambling talk during which K. first sits, then lies on his bed, and during the talk it appears that this could have been the one rare opportunity, the unique chance that his request be granted, for that is the moment when "the member of the public can now control everything if he wants to, and need do nothing but somehow or other make his request, there is a document for granting it already prepared, we say, ready to be handed to him" (235-6). K., missing his moment, has meanwhile fallen asleep.

On the threshold of sleep

Enough of Kafka. Let us look at this edge from another angle. At the time when Kafka was writing *The Trial* in 1913 (to be published in 1925) Marcel Proust, in another part of Europe and completely unaware of Kafka, was preparing the publication of the first volume of the grand edifice of what would become *In Search of Lost Time*. The first volume *Du côté de chez Swann*, *Swann's Way*, appeared in 1913, and it famously opens on the same threshold, in the intermediate state between wakefulness and sleep. One could say that the modernist novel springs from this threshold, from the crack between two worlds. Unlike Kafka, however, Proust crosses the threshold in the opposite direction: from the state of being awake into gradually falling asleep. The narrator sinks into a slumber. He describes himself losing consciousness, irresistibly submitting to sleep, yet the threshold is elusive; sometimes sleep arrives before one can think of it, sometimes it recedes indefinitely and one is feverishly awake against one's will for hours. It is not something that one can control and command. It has a temporality and a causality of its own, but what he tries to hold on to is precisely a region at the boundary, neither the one nor the other. It is on this edge, at the moment after one has abandoned the familiar yet before one has entered the dream-world and its derailed logic, that memories start flooding in, a vast tapestry of memories that one hasn't invited nor tried to recall. They are intruders at the interstice, what Proust will call *la mémoire involontaire*, involuntary memory, beyond the reach of conscious intentions, and precisely for that reason the harbinger

of another kind of truth.

There is an intricate web of signs and associations unavailable to consciousness in its normal state, yet not the stuff of dreams. Everything else will follow from that threshold; what emerges there will be the realm of Proust's entire undertaking. It will take seven bulky volumes to unravel what begins on the first page. The whole immense edifice is made of this stuff – not of such stuff that dreams are made of, nor of the stuff of wakefulness, but the edge between.

A neat symmetrical opposition can be made: *The Trial* opens in the morning; Josef K. awakes, but not quite. *Swann's Way*, by contrast, begins at nighttime, with the narrator sinking into sleep, but not quite. Josef K. is painfully overwhelmed by a strange dream-like reality; Proust's narrator is overwhelmed by the stuff of his uncontrollable memories which spur him on and where the familiar comes to appear new and unexpected. Yet one could tentatively disentangle a common denominator they share: the threshold. One can take a cue from Walter Benjamin in his brilliant essay on Proust: "And there is no telling what encounters would be in store for us if we were less inclined to give in to sleep. Proust didn't give in to sleep."⁵ On the very edge of slumber resides an imperative: don't give way to sleep. The injunction to yield to the lulling edge, thus losing the conscious control over the world of meaning, is actually its opposite, the injunction to wake up from the slumber usually presented by consciousness and habit. One has to give in to slumber in order to arrive at another world lurking beyond habit. And what we find there is not a nostalgic dive into the past, its quasi-oneiric reconstruction, a recuperation of the lost time in *Le Temps retrouvé*. It is not that the title hero, time, has been lost and found again. What is at stake is rather the apprenticeship of the new, to use Deleuze's term. Proust's focal point is not the past but the future, not nostalgia, not loss and its impossible recuperation, but the becoming of the new. Deleuze, another great reader of both Proust and Kafka, will insist on this at length.⁶ As for Proust's memories of the past, we owe Samuel Beckett, another great reader of Proust, the best line ever written on this: "Proust had a bad memory."⁷

Jacques Lacan, in his seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, dwells for

5 "On the Image of Proust", *Selected Writings* 2/1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1999), 238-9. Benjamin, a great reader of both Proust and Kafka, has actually himself co-translated two volumes of Proust's saga into German.

6 Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes* (Paris: PUF, 1970).

7 Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press 1978), 17.

a moment on this edge between sleep and wakefulness. He takes up one of Freud's dreams from *Traumdeutung*, the most Kafkaesque of all the dreams Freud ever interpreted—a dream which reads straight as a Kafka story.⁸ A father keeps watch at night over the body of his dead son, who is laid out in the adjoining room, surrounded by burning candles. He falls asleep during this terrible wake, leaving an old man in charge.

After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see that I am burning?'* [*Vater, siehst du nicht dass ich verbrenne?*] He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them.⁹

How to understand this dream? The real intrusion—the light and the smell of the burning from the next room—were integrated into the father's dream, which at its heart, contains the appeal of the dead child standing at his father's bedside, causing him to wake up. This is like vintage Kafka. Freud briefly discusses this dream at the beginning of the seventh and final chapter of his book on dreams, at the point where he is moving on from the interpretation of dreams to engage in a murky realm that one could call 'beyond interpretation'. There is nothing much to interpret in this dream, says Freud, it all seems to be laid out, yet what is most significant is the uncanny encounter produced in the dream. From out of the intersecting empirical and dream realities, something emerges that is irreducible to either empirical reality or to the psychology of dreams and their interpretation.

Freud maintains, throughout his book on dreams, that one crucial function of the dream is to be the guardian of sleep. Any external disturbance which might wake us up is integrated into the dream in order to keep us asleep, to enable the continuation of sleeping. The dream protects the sleeper from the

intrusion of reality. One eventually wakes up when the external disturbance becomes too intrusive. In the dream of the burning child, something else is at stake: the father is not woken up by the external disturbance but by something that occurred in the dream itself, something that was trying to protect him from the intrusion. One can say that the dream itself produces a real that is more overpowering than any external disturbance, such as the fire in the next room. It is the impossible appeal of the dead child that awakens the dreamer.

There is a paradox: the dream, in its endeavor to shield the dreamer, creates a real from which the dreamer then tries to escape; he tries to take refuge in the usual reality in order to be protected from what the dream has produced as a device of protection. The security measure turns out to be more dangerous than the danger against which it guards. There is something in the dream's own logic of wish-fulfilment that tends to run amok; it runs into a nightmare far more traumatic than reality, so one is forced to wake up in order to escape it. Lacan's point, in simplest terms, is this: we wake up in order to be able to continue to sleep, in order to escape the excess produced by the dream in its endeavor to protect our sleep. So we could say that first we dream in order to be able to continue to sleep, protected from the intrusion of reality. We then wake up in order to be able to continue to sleep, protected from the intrusion of the dream itself.¹⁰ Both the dream and the waking up ultimately protect the sleep. Yet, between the two lies the threshold of awakening, an edge between the real produced by the dream and the reality into which one wakes. This threshold is the missed encounter between the two, an interface where, for a moment, the one infringes upon the other.

Thus the encounter, forever missed, has occurred between dream and awakening, between the person who is still asleep and whose dream we will not know and the person who has dreamt merely in order not to wake up. [...] If Freud, amazed, sees in this the confirmation of his theory of desire, it is certainly a sign that the dream is not a fantasy fulfilling a wish.¹¹

8 *The Interpretation of Dreams, Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth Press), 5:509; *Studienausgabe II* (Frankfurt: Fischer 1982), 488.

9 One can recall that the most extreme modernist novel by James Joyce will be called *Finnegans Wake*, evoking both the wake over the dead and the strange temporality of awakening, a novel again written in the realm of the edge.

10 Cf. Jacques-Alain Miller, "Réveil", *Ornicar?* vol. 20-21/1980, pp. 49-53.

11 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), 59.

The encounter occurs as though in the gap between two fantasies: the one which sustains the dream and the one that sustains the waking life. Lacan uses the peculiarity of French language, the expletive *ne*: What am I *avant que je ne me reveille*? What am I before I wake up? – or before I don't wake up? The ambiguity of this gets lost in translation, at least in English (this strange negation curiously exists in Slovene). Is one awake or is one asleep?

Freud is fully aware that there is something there that eludes his theory of dreams, or rather something that presents its limit and reaches across its boundary. He has at this point of his book exhausted his resources of interpretation.

The problems of dream-interpretation have hitherto occupied the centre of the picture. And now we come upon a dream which raises no problem of interpretation and the meaning of which is obvious ... It is only after we have disposed of everything that has to do with the work of interpretation that we can begin to realize the incompleteness of our psychology of dreams. (510-11)

There is an uncanny moment when the dream redoubles the reality, while still being and no longer being just a dream. It produces a real which is no longer a matter of interpretation – precisely at the point where the dream is not merely a fantasy fulfilling a wish, as Lacan put it. The awakening is the limit of the interpretation of dreams not in the sense that from then on we have the normal waking life where the distortion of dreams no longer applies, but in the sense that at the border of the two worlds something is produced that doesn't belong to either.

Josef K. wakes up in this temporal modality; he does and does not wake up. This is also what happens to Gregor Samsa, and to the badger in "The Burrow". The reality into which they awake is like the continuation of a dream, but—and this is crucial—this is not the reality into which one awakes to escape the real of the dream—quite the contrary. It is a real from which both the dream and the awakening were supposed to protect us. The missed encounter evokes something impossible, it only emerges for a fleeting moment in which everything vacillates. There is something

like an ontological opening at this edge where the usual assumptions are shaken for just a moment. There is an encounter with something that cannot be accounted for in terms of either reality or psychology, neither empirical nor psychic life.

'Ontological opening' may sound like an overstatement for something that appears to be fickle and tiny. Yet there is an experience there that may have always existed, somewhere on the margins, but which is perhaps new in the sense that it has for the first time come to occupy centre stage. My proposal is broadly that this experience is tightly linked to a privileged moment of modernity, conditioning both the advent of modern literature and of psychoanalysis. There was a historical turn, starting at the turn of the century, that one might describe as 'the moment of awakening'. But what is at stake is not an awakening to reality, but an awakening to something that gets lost in the reality once constituted and made ontologically consistent. There is a real that emerges on the very verge, and holding on to it started serving as the red thread for both theory and artistic practices. It embodies the break between two worlds, and in that break something comes up that doesn't belong to either and, since it only flickers for a moment, it takes a supreme alertness and mastery to hold on to it, to prolong it, to make a literature out of it, to turn it into an object of theoretical pursuit.

Let me list here, somewhat schematically, what happened in 1913. In 1913 Kafka was writing *The Trial* and Proust published *Swann's Way*. Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, written much later, starts off on a beautiful August day in Vienna in 1913. 1913 was the year of Marcel Duchamp's first ready-made, *La roue de bicyclette*. It was the year in which Kazimir Malevich painted the first version of the *Black square on white background* (first exhibited in 1915 in St. Petersburg),¹² and the year in which Kandinsky and Klee were painting the first abstract paintings. In March 1913 Arnold Schönberg organized a concert of his music and the music of his pupils in Vienna; the concert was violently interrupted, a scandal ensued and questions were asked in the Austrian Parliament. Stravinsky gave the first performance of *Le sacre du printemps* in Paris in May 1913, which was also interrupted, followed by a scandal and riots in the streets. In 1913 Apollinaire published *Alcools*, one of

12 For the emergence of the object in visual arts, in Duchamp and Malevich, cf. the magisterial book by Gérard Wajcman, *L'objet du siècle* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1999).

the most important collections of modernist poetry. It was in 1913 that Gertrud Stein wrote the line “A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose”. In 1913 Freud was preoccupied with his metapsychological writings, some of his most perspicacious texts. It was a year of awakening if ever there was one.¹³ What happened in the space of this one year? Of course the means and the methods in each of these cases varied but my inkling is that a common denominator exists among them: articulating something of what I have called the edge is a condition of this curious awakening.

If there is a wake-up call pertaining to modernity, then this is a very peculiar kind of wake-up call. Wake-up calls, to put it briefly, are fundamentally linked to the mechanisms of ideology. There is always a wake-up call involved in a basic ideological move, and what Althusser pinpointed by the notion of interpellation is precisely this: awakening to a recognition, an emergence of sense, the retroactive imposition of sense on what didn’t make sense, the coordinates, from blindness to insight. One was blind but now can see. This is, in fact, precisely the moment of obfuscation. This is where Kafka stops this process on the threshold, just before the advent of sense. Something is revealed that is not covered by meaning, and these are the words that Gershom Sholem used, a propos Kafka, in his correspondence with Adorno in the thirties: *Offenbarung ohne Bedeutung*, revelation without a meaning. This is a wake-up call that thwarts waking up, a wake-up call against wake-up calls, dismantling their logic. It is like interpellation in reverse—a moment when precisely one cannot recognize oneself, a reality that one cannot claim as one’s own, a moment where sense and recognition falter, an experience that is impossible to sustain, yet which, once it has come to the foreground, casts a different light on everything, and the very notion of interpellation, as a handy common denominator (of waking up), could be conceived only on the basis of its impossibility. This is an experience that one always misses—hence Lacan’s insistence on the missed encounter as constitutive of the real—yet it is also something that doesn’t simply vanish. What is missed perseveres as an opening, it introduces a rift that displaces all subsequent wake-up calls.

In a variety of ways, this strange modality of waking up has shaped the subsequent philosophical and artistic pursuits of the early twentieth century, in persistent attempts to show fidelity to what emerges between two dreams, between two fantasies, something very difficult to hold on to. We still need the formidable guidance of Kafka and Freud.

13 Scholars have looked into this at some length. Cf. Jean-Michel Rabaté, *1913: The Cradle of Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Liliane Brion-Guerry (ed.), *L’Année 1913: Les Formes esthétiques de l’oeuvre d’art à la veille de la première guerre mondiale*, 3 vols (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971); Fredric Morton, *Thunder at Twilight: Vienna 1913/1914* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2001); Alan Valentine, *1913: America between Two Worlds* (London: Macmillan, 1962); Virginia Cowles, *1913: An End and a Beginning* (New York: Harper & Row 1968)

Tagore after Lacan: The Effect of the Change of the Ending of *Gora* on the Clinical Structure of its Protagonist

Santanu Biswas

The novel *Gora*, serialised in the Bengali monthly *Prabasi* between September 1907 and March 1910, contains Rabindranath Tagore's (1861–1941) most elaborate analysis of Indian social life in its rich complexity. Tagore began the novel sometime in 1907 in order to settle a financial debt owed to the editor of *Prabasi*, Ramananda Chatterjee, which he incurred at the time of his daughter's marriage in May–June of that year.

Gora narrates the story of its eponymous hero. In Bengali, the word “Gora” contains an allusion to “Gauranga,” the 15th century religious and social reformer and the most eminent human devotee of the Hindu god Krishna, who had many mythical devotees too. The name Gauranga means “fair bodied,” while the name Krishna means dark-complexioned. Given the intensity of his devotion to Krishna, and owing to his complexion, Gauranga is often regarded as the fair-complexioned reincarnation of Lord Krishna in Bengali literature and folklore. Among other things, Lord Krishna is well known for his legendary love affair with his adoptive maternal aunt, variously named Radha, Radhika, Radharani, etc. It is true that the novel *Gora* contains several interesting echoes of some of these names. For instance, it contains a character named Krishnadayal in the form of Gora's foster-father; and a character named Radharani, Gora's lover, who however is usually referred to in the novel by her other name, Sucharita. Besides, Gora's

own formal name is Gaurmohan, where Mohan itself is another name for Krishna. On top of that, Gora, who lost his biological parents at birth, is somewhat like Krishna, who was separated from his biological parents at birth. Nevertheless, I shall not develop these mythical allusions and their possible textual ramifications because they are not directly related to the question we are concerned with. Instead, it suffices for our purpose to note the two meanings of the word “Gora” in Bengali. Literally, the word “Gora” or “Gaur” mean “fair-complexioned”, and as such it is used to describe Indians with a fair complexion in a positive sense. It also has a second usage as a slang, since the word “Gora” stands for white men in general in a slightly derogatory sense. The title of the novel stands for both of these, for Gora denotes the complexion of the boy thus named, and at the same time bears an ironic allusion to the protagonist's Irish identity.

The novel deals with an Irish orphan named Gora who is born during the revolution of the Sepoys against the British in 1857, and is brought up as her own child by a benign and barren Bengali Brahmin named Anandamoyee. Almost from the outset of the novel, Gora presents himself as a vehement believer and an obsessive advocate of orthodox Hindu nationalism in complete ignorance of his European ancestry. He becomes the leader of a small group of young men, though only two of them, Binoy and Abinash, figure directly in the novel. Nor are the activities of the group

explained to the readers other than cursorily. All that the reader does come across in the greater part of the first half of the novel is Gora in the act of passionately explaining to Binoy or to Anandamoyee, usually separately, the greatness of Hinduism, and more importantly, what a true Hindu must not do, such as marry outside the Hindu community, eat food cooked by a non-Hindu, and so on. In course of time Gora feels attracted towards Sucharita, but he is so distressed by his attraction that he not only reprimands himself but also departs from Calcutta, where the novel is set, in order to overcome the impulse. Subsequent events land Gora in prison, thereby excluding him from the action towards the beginning of the last third, and prompting a temporary shift in the novel's focus to Binoy and the fruition of his love with Lolita. Once out of prison, Gora decides to undergo ceremonial penance in order to undo the spiritual contamination caused by his imprisonment. But before the ceremony can take place, his foster father, Krishnadayal, breaks the news to him that he was not born a Hindu. Thus, Gora suddenly discovers towards the very end of the novel that he was of European extraction and hence an outcaste in terms of the very faith he had always proudly regarded as his own. He rushes to Sucharita's foster father Paresh Babu soon after this revelation in order to offer himself to the latter as his disciple and to seek Sucharita's hand in marriage.

Insofar as the novel depicts the story of Gora's education through his recognition of the hidden truth about himself, it is a bildungsroman. However, insofar as the truth about Gora's Irish identity is repressed from him and is meant for him to discover retroactively, that is, insofar as he is suspended in a state of ironic ignorance regarding the truth of his birth, subjectivity and identity until the very end—to which he is moreover led by his own inadvertent subjective intervention—Gora is an "Oedipal" hero. Now although its protagonist is thus clearly placed within an Oedipal situation of irony, the novel has been read in every conceivable way so far other than psychoanalytically. The aim of this essay is to begin to fill up this glaring gap in *Gora*-criticism by taking up the crucial problem of the structuring of the desire of the Mother in the paternal metaphor that the novel is predominantly concerned with.

Problematic Desire of the Mother

In perfect consonance with the Lacanian axiom that man's desire is the desire of the Mother, the circuit of desire in the novel clearly originates from Gora's foster mother Anandamoyee.¹ In a poem written by Tagore, possibly in 1903, which he had himself translated into English under the title "The Beginning," a child ask its mother: "Where have I come from, where did you pick me up?" The mother replies:

Half crying, half laughing,
And clasping the baby to her breast,-
"You were hidden in my heart as its
Desire, my darling,
You were in the dolls of my childhood's
Games; and when with clay I made the
Image of Shiva [Hindu god] every morning, I
made
And unmade you then. [...]"²

The origin of the course of desire in *Gora* is similar to the one described in these lines insofar as Gora, too, is the outcome of Anandamoyee's desire; he was her longing, her dream. Desire in the novel originates from Anandamoyee and, as if to highlight the quality of a deep yearning about it, the narrator gave its earliest expression in the novel the form of a dream that she narrated to her husband, Krishnadayal, even before the baby Gora was in sight:

One day in a dream I went to the prayer room with a basket of white fool foot flowers—and as I prayed I saw that the flowers had gone and in their place was a little boy, as fair as the flowers! Ah, I can never tell you what I felt at that moment. My eyes filled with tears. When I quickly moved to pick up the child, I woke up. And ten days had not passed after that when my Gora was given to me.³

Thus, Gora was already present as the chief component of Anandamoyee's dream or desire even before the Irish infant in question came to embody it.

For the greater part of the novel, Gora is barred from knowing the truth about his birth. For all we know, Krishnadayal, while agreeing to allow Anandamoyee

1 J. Lacan, 2017, 175 and Lacan: 2013/2019, 269–290.

2 R. Tagore, 1913/1988, 14.

3 R. Tagore, 1910/1997, 30. Translation modified. Unless otherwise mentioned, 'Translation modified' means that the Bengali expressions left untranslated in the original translation have been translated into English by me.

to keep the Irish baby, had, owing to professional constraints, imposed on her the condition that she shall not reveal Gora's identity to him until Krishnadayal died; and Anandamoyee had agreed to abide by the condition owing to her intense longing to have a baby of her own, at any cost. As a result of this arrangement, there is at the heart of Anandamoyee's character, a problematic desire for Gora. Anandamoyee's desire for Gora must be regarded as problematic because the suppressed truth underlying its fulfilment compelled her to crave the censure of others, while also compulsively equivocating on matters regarding Gora's birth and identity:

From the day she had picked up the infant Gora and cradled him in her arms, she had become independent of the practices and judgement of other people. From that day she had followed a course of conduct which only earned her the censure of others. A suppression of truth at the core of her life pained her endlessly, but being criticized by other people relieved her pain to some extent. When others accused her of having become a Christian [implying, an outcaste], she used to clutch Gora to her bosom and say, "God knows it is no condemnation to be called a Christian" (221, trans. modified).

Being the Maternal Phallus versus Having the Phallus

If Anandamoyee's desire is to *have* Gora as the object of her desire, Gora's desire was to *be* that object for Anandamoyee. There are several indications of this in the text. Let us study them in turn, beginning with Gora's strong resistance to hearing the half-truth equivocally articulated by Anandamoyee.

On one occasion early in the novel, in reply to Gora's incomplete allegation that she was guilty of not abiding by the Hindu customs despite hailing from a renowned Hindu family, Anandamoyee first explained that she had been forced by her husband to give up her customs one by one. Then, later in the same chapter, she produced a second justification, which goes as follows:

Yet it was only when I first took you in my arms that I gave up all customs. Only when you hold a little child to your breast do you realize that nobody is born on earth with a caste. The moment I realised this, from that moment I

have been sure that if I were to look down upon somebody else because he was of low caste or a Christian, then God would snatch you away from me. May you always fill my arms and light up my home, I prayed, and I would drink water from the hands of every caste in the world (15).

Gora's somewhat obstinate deafness to the half-truth contained in this piece of equivocation is extremely significant. It suggests that he did not want to risk his desired status of being the object of his mother's desire by listening to her destructive half-truths. Simply put, Gora preferred to be deaf to the hint of the half-truth equivocally conveyed by Anandamoyee because he stubbornly wanted to remain the maternal phallus that he was. The following example shows how Gora continued to remain resistant to the half-truth in spite of Binoy's best attempts to draw his attention to it:

Binoy said hesitantly, "You know, Gora, something Ma said today makes me feel disturbed. It seems to me there is something on her mind which she cannot convey to us, and that is troubling her."

Gora said impatiently, "Ah, Binoy, must you always imagine things! That leads nowhere and only wastes time."

Binoy: You never look properly at things around you in this world, so you can dismiss as imaginary whatever you haven't seen. But I tell you I have noticed quite often that Ma is nursing some anxiety within her—something that doesn't fit into things around her—and this causes some sorrow in her everyday life at home. Gora, do listen more carefully to what she says.

Gora: I do listen with enough care to what my ears can catch. Trying to hear more may run the risk of hearing wrongly (16–17).

Gora's desire to remain the maternal phallus is also brought out by his reactions to his awareness of his desire for Sucharita. In the beginning, woman was the same as mother to Gora. He said to Binoy in chapter 2:

The scriptures say about women *pujarha grihadeeptayah*—that is, they are worthy of worship because they light up the house. Whereas when they light up the hearts of men

and are honoured for this by western custom, it is better not to call it by the name of worship [...]. The proper place to worship women is where they are installed as Mother (10–11, trans. modified).

Perhaps owing to this idea that woman and mother were identical as objects of worship, Gora's reaction to the thoughts that expressed to him his own desire, in the form of his sexual desire for Sucharita, was to attempt to *escape* from it. The first indication of this appears in chapter 6. Krishnadayal, who had become a God-fearing person since his retirement, did not want the Christian Gora to marry a Hindu girl. For that reason, he asked Gora to meet his Brahmo (i.e., non-Hindu) friend Paresh Babu to find out how he was faring, with the hope that it might eventually lead to a relationship between Gora and one of Paresh Babu's daughters. Gora promised to oblige but immediately altered his promise stating that he could not visit Paresh Babu's house because he must go on a pilgrimage to Tribeni. It was only after Binoy appeared to have become quite knowledgeable about women that Gora started to sense a curiosity on that matter. Accordingly, in chapter 20, when Binoy requested Gora to accompany him to Paresh Babu's house where the former had been regularly interacting with Sucharita and Lolita, we are told the following by the narrator:

Gora agreed without any demur. Not only did he agree, there was no longer the lack of enthusiasm that he harboured in his mind earlier. At first Gora used to be totally indifferent to the existence of Sucharita and Paresh Babu's other daughters, then a kind of hostile contempt towards them had grown in his mind but now that was replaced by a curiosity about them. He was particularly keen to know what it was that had drawn Binoy's interest so strongly (128).

And yet again, in the very next chapter, when Gora sensed tender feelings for Sucharita, he force-

fully denied them: "No, all this is nothing, this will never do" (141), and instead of abiding by his decision to go to Sucharita's house with Binoy, he went on a trek along the Grand Trunk Road with his friends. On both these occasions, Gora tried to distance himself from Sucharita and his desire for her, literally, by physically departing from Calcutta. Gora's hesitation concerning his desire for Sucharita is the hesitation of someone who has not made the transition from the dialectic of being to the dialectic of having, as Lacan puts it. It is clear from these indications in the novel that Gora strongly wanted to *be* the subject of his mother's desire, which is what made him so apprehensive about *having* his own object of desire.⁴

It is important to note in this context that Binoy was able to make the same transition, from *being* to *having*, relatively easily, albeit with some smart assistance from his beloved Lolita. Binoy is in many ways Gora's double. Like Gora, Binoy had lost his parents. Both Gora and Binoy were of the same age, and they had studied and passed their examinations at the school and college together. For a considerable period of time, they had grown up together as friends under the caring supervision of Anandamoyee, whom both addressed as "Ma" or mother. Besides, Binoy fell in love with Lolita, who was a sister-figure to Sucharita, the two adorable "daughters" of Paresh Babu. This makes the contrast between Binoy and Gora on the question of assuming their respective desires so striking. Since Binoy had a far less problematic desire of the Mother to reckon with, he could make the transition from being to having with greater ease than Gora. Gora on the other hand is clearly crippled by the dread of assuming the position of the desiring subject. In short, Binoy could easily assume the role of a desiring *subject* at a time when Gora could not think of being anything other than a desired *object*.⁵

The Imaginary Mother qua her Enemy

The most important indication in the novel of Gora's wish to remain the maternal phallus, however, is to be found in his concept of the motherland. It is a concept that he consistently wields to prove to

4 Gora came to recognize his ignorance of womankind as a defect as late as in chapter 54 when Sucharita said to Binoy while taking leave of Anandamoyee after a visit: 'Won't you come to visit us one of these days?' Gora, unable to understand why she had not requested him as well, felt a little hurt. The narrator reports: 'Never before had it been a matter of regret to Gora that while Binoy could easily mix with everybody, Gora could not. Today he recognized this inability of his nature as a failing and felt deprived' (332).

5 For more details of the three times of the Oedipus complex—namely, to be or not to be the maternal phallus as the first time, to have or not to have the phallus as the second time, and to have the phallus by not having it as the third time—including the idea of the structuring of the desire of the Mother in the paternal metaphor, see J. Lacan, 1998/2017, 163–196, as well as J. Lacan, 2013/2019 and 1994/2021.

himself that he was nothing if not a faithful object of his mother's desire. In order to prove this, however, he had to invent an imaginary mother in the form of Mother-India. Let us examine Gora's Mother-India and his relationship with this concept, beginning with the following excerpt from chapter 4 in which Binoy had placed the question categorically before Gora:

Binoy: Where is this India of yours?

Gora placed a hand on his chest and said, "Where the compass I have here points day and night, here I have it— not in your Marshman's *History of India*."

Binoy: Does something really exist at the place to which your compass points?

Gora replied excitedly, "Of course there is. I can lose my way, I may drown, but that port of Laxmi is always there. That is my fully formed India— full in health, full in knowledge, full in justice. Do you think India is nowhere? That only falsehood is around us everywhere? This Calcutta of yours, these offices, these law courts, and these few bubbles of brick and wood! [...]. [T]hrow all this away and launch our ship towards that very same port. We shall drown if we must, we shall die if we must. Until then I cannot set aside my image of a real India, a complete India" (21, trans. modified).

The passage indicates that this concept of Mother-India to which Gora was affectively attached was almost like a living entity to him. He felt its existence within him every moment. He calls it "real India" even though it was evidently a mental image. This image, moreover, is described in terms of Laxmi, the Hindu household goddess of abundance, and is thus clearly reminiscent of the character of Anandamoyee. On the other hand, figures like Marshman or, in this instance, Binoy, who did not perceive this concept in the same way, were as far from the truth as was the observable reality that appeared to represent it. Thus, it is in terms of a combination of a strong and subjective faith in an image of the motherland on the one hand, and an aggressive dismissal of a real or imaginary other who appeared to disregard any aspect of such an image on the other hand, that Gora at once symptomatically sustained his faith in the image and himself in his faith.

This is the form in which we encounter Gora's relationship with Mother-India at the outset; and the relationship is sustained in this very form until the beginning of the last quarter of the novel. Let us look at another example of the same aggressive play of identification with an image of the mother and opposition to its detractors from a later stage of the text, so as to appreciate the consistency in Gora's attitude on this matter. In chapter 53, in course of debating Binoy's decision to marry Lolita, Gora said to Binoy:

[T]here is need to understand with one's heart. It is a matter of great sorrow to me that you are bent upon cutting yourself off from the people of your own country by marrying a Brahmo girl. You can do such a thing, I never could. That is the difference between us—not in wisdom or in intelligence. I have an emotional attachment which you lack. If you can use a knife to set yourself free, obviously you do not feel the same way about the pull of the umbilical cord. I want the India that I know. You may blame it, abuse it, but I want that and no other (324, trans. modified).⁶

These passages also indicate Gora's singular inability to apprehend this image *as* an image and thereby find a stable footing in the symbolic register beyond the imaginary.

Perhaps we can pace Gora's mind on this matter slightly better by asking the question: Who, really, is Gora's imaginary adversary? Gora's imaginary adversary was clearly the one who appeared to be contemptuous of, or indifferent to, the image of the mother to which he was dyadically and compulsively tied. Now, is that not exactly what Anandamoyee feared the revelation of the truth of his birth might turn Gora into? Anandamoyee was conscious of her desire and of how it had been fulfilled; hence she was merely apprehensive of its possibility. Gora on the other hand was unconscious; hence he zealously opposed this imaginary construct—which was but an image of Gora himself in Anandamoyee's nightmares—as an enemy of the motherland, its religion and its rituals.

In chapter 53, Gora himself felt for a moment that his desire to serve his motherland was rooted in his desire for Anandamoyee. Owing to what Gora

⁶ In the original translation into English, the Bengali expression for 'the pull of the umbilical cord' is rendered as 'the bond of birth'.

considered acts that reflected Binoy's indifference and Abinash's idiocy, he was wondering if India was not "a reality only to [him]" (326), when a servant came to inform Gora that his mother was calling him. The narrator reports:

Gora was startled, and repeated to himself "Mother is calling!" It seemed that this message bore some new significance for him. He said to himself, "Whatever else happens, I have my mother. It is she who is calling me [...]. Mother had called me when I was in jail, and I had seen her there. She is calling me now that I am out of jail and I must make this journey to go and see her" (327).

And in chapter 69, Gora had separately realised that his desire was not his *own* desire but the desire *of* the Mother: "There was a firm conviction in Gora's mind that most events in his life were neither accidental, nor did he make them happen out of his volition. He believed that he was born to fulfil some particular purpose of his own country's destiny" (443). However, Gora himself was never in a position to combine the two and thereby recognise, name and thus release the occult equation motherland=mother until we arrive at And in chapter 69, Gora had separately realised that his desire was not his own desire but the desire of the Mother: "There was a firm conviction in Gora's mind that most events in his life were neither accidental, nor did he make them happen out of his volition. He believed that he was born to fulfil some particular purpose of his own country's destiny" (443). However, Gora himself was never in a position to combine the two and thereby recognise, name and thus release the occult equation motherland=mother until we arrive at the epilogue to the novel.

Distantiation of the Imaginary Mother

Gora's inner preparation to encounter the truth about himself that he knew not began when he was in prison. But his preparation took the most decisive turn when his own desire was badly shaken up from within by his feelings for Sucharita. It forced Gora to take to worshipping the idol of the goddess in the household temple, as well as to establish a radically new relationship with his imaginary mother in course of doing so:

Gora had not previously engaged himself in the worship of gods. But ever since his heart

was troubled, when he could not tie himself down to anything, when work felt like a void and half of life seemed to be crying in despair—from such a time he had tried to apply his mind to worship. He sat still before the idol of the goddess and tried to concentrate on it (453).

The first sentence of the excerpt, "Gora had not previously engaged himself in the worship of gods" is a rare slip of the pen in Tagore's writings. It certainly is a slip because the narrator had very briefly mentioned in chapter 5 of the novel that Gora had developed the habit of "performing ceremonial worship every evening"! (28) The practical explanation of this slip would probably have to do with Tagore's oblivion of that brief remark made in chapter 5 while he was writing chapter 71 at a much later date, and the repetition of the same error while revising his drafts. I would prefer, however, to give full force to this slip and suggest that this piece of factual incongruity in the narration in fact dialectically implies that this particular session of idol-worship was radically unlike any other to have preceded it.

A closer look at the textual details would suggest that Gora indeed had never previously engaged himself in a worship of this kind, for, in this very unique instance of worship, it is clearly not the expression of devotion but the formalisation of a division between the devotee and the divinity that is at stake:

After some time Gora began to think that a Brahmin does not need to feel devotion. Devotion was the peculiar possession of the masses. The bridge which connected the devotee to the object of devotion must be the bridge of knowledge. Such a bridge not only maintained the connection, it also marked the boundary on both sides. If there were no intervening space of unadulterated knowledge between the devotee and divinity, everything would get distorted ...

Briefly, his heart had defeated Gora; because of that transgression, he sentenced his heart to exile (454).

The accent on "knowledge" together with the act of subordination of "devotion," of the "masses" and of the "heart" in Gora's prayer in this special instance of worship, appear to represent a symbolic act on Gora's part of externalising the imaginary mother by dissoci-

ating and distancing her from himself in reality. That he did so at a time perilously close to the time of his recognition of the truth seems to indicate moreover that the hour of the truth was more important to the narrator than the truth itself. The narrator wonders at this point: "Who will escort the culprit to banishment! Where was the band of soldiers to enforce the sentence!" (454). The answers to these questions, in that order, are: Sucharita and in Krishnadayal.

Structuring of the Desire of the Mother by the Castrating Father

Krishnadayal represents the paternal "No" for Gora. It is clear from the narrative that the two men were never fond of each other. When Krishnadayal was in service with the Commissariat, he was an arrogant atheist, which is why he had not objected to Anandamoyee keeping Gora to herself despite his not being of Hindu origin. After his retirement, however, Krishnadayal became a God-fearing puritanical and ritualistic Hindu Brahmin who was anxious about Gora's aggressive practise of Hinduism from the points of view of the laws of his faith and the laws of the land. On one occasion in chapter 5, a situation emerged when he could have divulged the truth of his birth to Gora, but chose to be equivocal instead:

Krishnadayal kept shaking his head as he said, "No, my son, you can't become a Hindu by claiming to be one... [B]ecoming a Hindu? No, that's very difficult."

Gora: True enough. But since I have been born as a Hindu I have already entered through the main door. If I can apply myself correctly I shall gradually make progress.

Krishnadayal: Son, [...] what you are saying is also quite right. Whatever is the result of your actions, whatever faith has been ordained for you, you will return sooner or later to the path of that faith—nobody can stand in your way (29).

Toward the end of the novel however, when Krishnadayal felt severely constrained by his own obsession with ritual purity, he came tantalisingly close to being forced by an unsuspecting Gora to reveal the truth of his birth to him; and on this occasion he spoke as though he was no longer keen to protect Gora from the truth:

"Let me tell you again— you think you have found entry into the religion of Hindus, but you are incapable of it. Every drop of your blood, every part of your body from head to foot, is opposed to it. You cannot suddenly become a Hindu, however much you may want to be one. For that the good deeds have to be done for many births". When Gora asked if he had not inherited it from his family, Krishnadayal retorted: "Have you no hesitation about contradicting me to my face? And still you call yourself a Hindu! How will you hide this foreign temper of yours?" (458).

Even a remark as categorical as this may not have sufficed to capture Gora's attention had he not started to prepare himself from within by severing his ties with the imaginary mother and by deciding to devote himself to knowledge in the household temple. Owing to his inner preparation however, unlike his characteristic dismissal of half-truths, Gora, on this occasion, took the risk of paying attention to it. While reflecting on Krishnadayal's words a little later, Gora started to feel uneasy about the insistence of something in his mind. The narrator reports: "An indistinct notion began growing in his mind about some hidden truth that underlay all that Krishnadayal had said. It was like a formless nightmare oppressing him and he was not able to dispel it" (459). In the final analysis, Anandamoyee's dream had started to become Gora's nightmare!

Finally, in chapter 75, Krishnadayal, performing his part in structuring Gora's desire of the Mother, produced the brutal yet vital blow by pointing to the truth so long withheld from Gora. Krishnadayal, who now thought he had made a blunder by attributing the sacred thread [meant only for the Brahmins] to Gora and thus publicly formalising the latter's Hindu identity, decided that he must prevent the same mistake from being repeated when Gora was about to undergo Hindu ceremonial penance following his release from prison. Therefore, he summoned Gora from the site of the ceremony and revealed the following to him from his sickbed:

"It was during the Mutiny. We were in Etawa then. Your mother fled from the Indian revolutionaries and sought refuge one night in our house. Your father was killed in the previous

day's fighting. [...]”⁷ After a pause he said, “He was an Irishman. That very night your mother died after giving birth to you. Ever since then you have been brought up in our house” (471).

Thus, with the help of a single blow, Krishnadaya completely severed Gora's ties with his beloved motherland and his adored mother, as well as Anandamoyee's ties with the most desired object of her life.

Identification with the Name-of-the-Father

Gora had estranged himself from his imaginary mother in the household temple, as we have seen. He had moreover managed to partially acknowledge his subjective desire for Sucharita in the meantime. Perhaps, he had also internally started to identify with what Lacan called the speech [*parole*] of the Father in terms of the ideology of Paresh Babu.⁸ In a word, Gora was so well prepared for the truth, albeit unknowingly, that he even managed to surmise shortly prior to the castrating revelation of the truth of his birth that his “new life will take birth only when the umbilical cord is slashed” (Tagore: 1910/1997, 464). Gora's knowledge of the truth of his birth, perhaps because it brought about the establishment of his Name-of-the-Father, instead of shattering him led him to believe what would otherwise have seemed completely paradoxical, namely, that he had obtained freedom and was “alive again!”⁹ Therefore, the facts that, radically unlike Oedipus, Gora had reconciled himself to the shocking truth almost as soon as he was exposed to it, and that he had left almost immediately to meet none other than Paresh Babu are, as acts, not puzzling but significantly appropriate, insofar as they reflect upon the precise course of structuring of his desire of the Mother by the paternal law.

In terms of his ideology especially, Paresh Babu represents the Name-of-the-Father for Gora. Somewhat like Tagore and Tagore's father Debendra Nath, Paresh Babu is a liberal humanist and a follower of the Brahmo faith. Also like Tagore and his father, Paresh Babu, too, sat in a silent meditation whenever he was deeply disturbed or pained. As an inclusionist he never discriminated against anyone whatsoever. He regarded everything, including the self, the nation

and one's religious beliefs, to be secondary to the Almighty whom he moreover regarded as completely formless and yet completely pervasive. In the world of the novel where most of the characters are fiercely opinionated and are perpetually debating or disputing every single issue, Paresh Babu, though he is not devoid of ideals, is astonishingly calm and detached. His sagacity and tolerance had ironically led to his exclusion from all social groups, but he does not seem to have any complaint against anyone, owing probably to his broad overview about mankind and his unflagging faith in his God. He thus validates in his own way Lacan's ethical proposition that the “hero [...] may be betrayed with impunity”.¹⁰ In chapter 76, Gora met Paresh Babu and spoke to him about his newfound freedom thus:

I have retreated again and again out of fear. How much I have struggled against forces all around me in order to build in my mind an India that was without problems or distortions, and hold my devotion safely within that impregnable fort. Today in a matter of moments that imagined fort has vanished like a dream. I have been released completely and find myself in the midst of a vast truth (475, trans. modified).

Gora was at last able to view Mother-India as an “imagined” fort, and his relationship with it as a form of bondage. He also explained why the first thing he did after obtaining freedom was to come to Paresh Babu: “Only you have the clue to such freedom. That is why you find no place in any community. Please make me your disciple” (476). Thus, Gora's Oedipus complex that kept him tied to his mother is finally resolved in terms of his identification with Paresh Babu as the Name-of-the-Father. In Lacan's words: “It's insofar as the father is loved that the subject identifies with him and discovers the final solution to the Oedipus complex”.¹¹

As for Sucharita, Gora was initially afraid of his attraction toward her. Later, however, he managed to acknowledge his liking for her albeit from *within* the delimiting framework of his desire of the Mother. This may be understood from the fact that while Sucharita

7 I have deliberately expunged four sentences here to which I will return at an appropriate time later.

8 J. Lacan, 1998/2017, 176.

9 R. Tagore, 1910/1924, 406.

10 J. Lacan, 1986/1992, 321.

11 J. Lacan, 1998/2017, 155.

herself found Gora attractive precisely due to the passion with which he pursued his ideas concerning Mother-India, Gora only expressed his desire for her for the first time in the novel in chapter 60 by saying to her, “I am nearly burned by the desire that you and I should be able to see my country together” (375). In other words, the desire of Gora and Sucharita for each other is completely conditioned and mediated by Gora’s omnipotent desire of the Mother. The detail of “seeing” is the second indicator of the influence of Gora’s desire of the Mother on his desire for Sucharita here. The readers are repeatedly informed that Anandamoyee’s primary wish was to be able to continue to see Gora. She was not worried that Gora refused to eat food cooked by her due to her association with her maid, Lachhmiya, who was a Christian. She was happy so long as she lived in the same house as Gora and was thus able to see him every day. Conversely, her greatest fear was that Gora might leave her and she would not be able to see him anymore. Thus, Gora’s invitation to Sucharita to see the motherland together, although it is an acknowledgement of his own desire on Gora’s part, is clearly *not* situated outside the trajectory of his desire of the Mother. The entire episode in which Gora expresses his desire to Sucharita is replete with references to seeing, the gaze, the eyes, looking at the eyes, seeing each other seeing each other, as though in a mirror, and so on. In chapter 76, however, following the structuring of his desire of the Mother in the paternal metaphor, Gora speaks to Sucharita in a very different language—one that refers to a symbolic gesture and deals with the formalisation of their relationship from the place of the symbolic Father:

Gora turned towards Sucharita who was sitting still in her chair. He smiled and said, “Sucharita, I am not your guru any more. I address this prayer to you—take my hand and lead me to your true guru [i.e., Paresh Babu]” (476).

Having by Not Having

Gora is the only novel by Tagore that contains an epilogue. In this short epilogue, Gora speaks to Anandamoyee with the knowledge that she is not his biological mother. He tells her that although he was not conscious of it earlier, it was she who best represented his Mother-India to him. Gora explains to her how he had rediscovered her after having lost her, as follows: “Ma, you are my only mother. The

mother for whom I have looked everywhere— all this time she was sitting in my house. You have no caste, you do not discriminate against people, you do not hate— you are the image of benediction. You are my India” (477, trans. modified). The time of the remark clearly reveals the fact that Gora could recognise and name the identification he had always made without being conscious of it only after he had renounced, and later lost, the object; that is to say, after the desire of the Mother had been alienated in the process of symbolisation by the law. Moreover, in terms of his very ability to designate it symbolically, the passage points to Gora’s evident mastery of the loss of the desired object. Finally, Gora’s symbolic designation of desire is also a matter of looking at the *other* side of his own discourse, insofar as his predominant idea concerning his mother and his motherland is chiastically transposed in the epilogue: after having thought of India as his mother, he now thinks of his mother as India. This, then, that in order to possess it the first step is to acknowledge that it cannot be possessed, is the unambiguous psychoanalytical story that *Gora*, apart from being a historical novel on burning social, political, racial and religious issues, begins to reveal itself to be.

Dominance of Mother’s Wish-fulfilment

The ending of *Gora* disappointed many readers, owing to Gora’s supposedly anticlimactic reaction to the castrating truth. Since the readers are informed about the truth of Gora’s Irish identity as early as in chapter 6 of the novel, much of their interest is sustained by the curiosity regarding how this fire-brand Hindu nationalist will react to the discovery that he is in fact not a Hindu. Every blazing proclamation by Gora in support of Hinduism thereafter only served to cumulatively intensify that curiosity. The feeling evoked by the published ending of the novel, therefore, resembles the feeling that the Athenians would probably have had if Jocasta and Oedipus were to have jointly declared at the end of *Oedipus Rex*: “So we know the truth at last, and it is good that we know the truth, for we will not be indulging in incest henceforth”. The problem, in a word, is that Gora’s castration does not make him bleed, which leaves the sadist strain in the readers dissatisfied. Although my reading of the novel largely forecloses this objection in terms of the contention that Gora was already internally prepared for his castration, albeit without knowing it, it fails to explain why, in

spite of being consciously unprepared for the truth to the extent that he consciously regarded it as a “nightmare” shortly before its revelation, he was not consciously shocked by the truth at the moment of its revelation, nor surprised that he was not shocked. This problem can be resolved in terms of a radically different interpretation of the novel based on reading the text in reverse.

What was the deepest desire of Anandamoyee? Since she was a barren woman, her deepest desire was to have a baby. This has textual support. She not only desired to have a baby of her own but actually desired to have a son, and a son as fair as a white flower. Thus, as Lacan consistently pointed out about desire, Anandamoyee’s desire clearly stemmed from her lack. Anandamoyee’s desire was fulfilled under somewhat exceptional circumstances. Gora’s father had died the day before his birth, Gora’s mother gave birth to the baby at the house of this childless woman and died immediately thereafter and, we must assume, that the Irish couple had no relations or acquaintances in India or elsewhere to investigate the matter further. Not only that, no one from Etawa or elsewhere wanted to know how Anandamoyee could have given birth to a white baby, and that too without ever revealing any sign of pregnancy! There were no questions, no doubts because Anandamoyee did not wish to be questioned or doubted on whether Gora was her own child or not. But was she happy to have had her wish fulfilled without anyone suspecting anything at all? No. After she had thus received Gora as a fortuitous gift, she was troubled by the thought of Gora’s potential reaction to the revelation of his true identity, indicating that she doubted whether Gora would continue to regard her as his mother as and when he came to know the truth that she was not his biological mother. She thus had a new wish. Now, she wanted to be certain that Gora was really as loyal to her as what her own son would have been; that is to say, that Gora indeed desired her as strongly as her biological son would have. In order to establish this, the narrator created the charged dramatic context for the revelation of the truth, so that Gora had to be more faithful than even her biological son in order to be able to regard Anandamoyee as his mother thereafter. Gora’s nationalism in this sense is the dramatic backdrop against which he was to confront the truth of his birth and decide the fate of his relationship with Anandamoyee. Quite clearly, the revelation of the truth in such a context is more than an ordeal by

fire. And Gora came out of it to say to Anandamoyee that she was his real mother, exactly as Anandamoyee had wished him to say. This is the point in the novel where, eventually, Anandamoyee’s wish to have a son of her own is well and truly fulfilled, for she was at last fully convinced that, despite Gora not being her own son, and notwithstanding the fortuitous manner in which she had received him, Gora was as faithful to her as what her biological son might have been. Was Anandamoyee fully contented with that? Not quite, for she still had two residual wishes left to be fulfilled, concerning Lachhmiya and Binoy. While Gora wanted Anandamoyee to drive her maid Lachhmiya away from the house because she was a Christian, Anandamoyee wanted Lachhmiya, who loved Gora almost as much as Anandamoyee herself did, to stay with them; and, since Binoy had been estranged from her following Gora’s demand to that effect ever since he had married the Brahmo girl Lolita, Anandamoyee wanted to be reunited with this other son of hers too. In the epilogue consisting of ten lines, the first seven lines are devoted to Gora’s declaration that she was his true mother. In the eighth line he said, “Ma, will you call Lachhmiya and tell her to get me now a glass of water?” (477) The last two lines of the novel consist of Anandamoyee’s request, “Gora, let me send for Binoy” (477). The narrator had not handled the ending in a different manner because, from this point of view, *Gora* is not a bildungsroman; it is not a novel about Gora’s education but a novel about Anandamoyee’s wish-fulfilment. Hence, the narrator may have left Gora’s reaction to the castrating truth somewhat under-explored but, notably, had not left a single wish of Anandamoyee unfulfilled. In other words, the most significant function of Gora in the plot is to strive to fulfil the wishes of Anandamoyee; and once Anandamoyee’s wishes are taken care of, Gora utility as a literary construct is well and truly exhausted. This is the *other* story that the novel *Gora* narrates about itself, and in spite of Tagore, for the title of the novel contains no mention of either Anandamoyee or her desire.

Perversion Sub-situates Neurosis

Does Gora, then, depict a subject of “neurosis” whose desire of the Mother is structured in and by the Name-of-the-Father qua Paresch Babu’s ideals following Krishnadaya’s No-of-the-Father? Although it appears to be so up to a point, the following indicators would provide us a better idea of the true clinical structure portrayed by Gora’s character in the final analysis:

To begin with, as far as his submission to Paresh Babu's ideals is concerned, it is noteworthy that Gora had not become a universal humanist like his guru. The epilogue indicates that Gora had improved from being an exclusionist Hindu nationalist by becoming an inclusionist nationalist, for he was now ready to drink water from the hands of Lachhmiya despite her being a Christian. However, till the very end, he continued to remain completely fixated on his notion of the nation instead of showing signs of having embraced the principles of universal humanism that his newfound mentor stood for. In other words, the structuration of his desire of the Mother by his Name-of-the-Father was, in the final analysis, an incomplete one. Moreover, Gora's *final* identification following the structuration of his desire is with his desire of the Mother, and not with his Name-of-the-Father, which enabled him and Anandamoyee to retain the maternal phallus, not by continuing to resist castration as they both used to do earlier, but by disavowing it. Gora was able to circumvent the effect of distress that his separation from Anandamoyee and India ought to have produced precisely owing to this disavowal of castration. In addition, Gora's desire is to be able to respond to the demand of the maternal phallus, which is the desire of the pervert according to Lacan: "One could say that the desire of the pervert is to respond to the demand of the [maternal] phallus".¹² All of these constitute fairly strong signs of "perversion". But above all, it is remarkable that several decades before Lacan had described the clinical structure of perversion in terms of the disavowal of the Name-of-the-Father, Tagore was able to produce an illustration of the same, albeit without any reference to the structure of perversion as such, in stunningly precise Lacanian terms! Here is the complete passage where Krishnadaya revealed the truth about his birth to Gora, including the four sentences I had deliberately excluded in the earlier quoted instance:

"It was during the Mutiny. We were in Etawa then. Your mother fled from the Indian revo-

lutionaries and sought refuge one night in our house. Your father was killed in the previous day's fighting. His name was—"

Gora interrupted loudly: "His name is not necessary. I don't wish to know the name."

Krishnadaya stopped, taken by surprise at Gora's vehemence. After a pause he said, "He was an Irishman. That very night your mother died after giving birth to you. Ever since then you have been brought up in our house" (471).

Gora's forceful disavowal of the Name-of-the-Father here is tantamount to his disavowal of castration— both his own castration and the castration of his mother. How can an Irish Christian man, biologically born of Irish Christian parents, knowingly regard himself first and foremost as the son of an Indian Hindu woman incapable of bearing children, other than by disavowing the Name-of-the-Father, the procreative function of the father, and castration in absolute terms?¹³ Gora was aware that the knowledge of his father's name would expose him to its insistence in his mind. Therefore, he chose to disavow it completely and vehemently. As we have already seen, Tagore, intending to write a novel on Gora's education, ended up writing a novel on the wish-fulfilment of his foster mother. The important psychoanalytic point here is that it would not have been possible for Tagore to privilege and fulfil the desire or demand of the Mother to such an extraordinary extent without having incongruously rendered Gora a subject of perversion in the ending.

The question as to how Gora might have reacted to the castrating truth if he depicted a subject of neurosis is, fortunately, possible to answer. Unknown to many readers of Tagore, the original ending of *Gora*, one that was never published, was radically different from the version that was published. We get to know about the original ending from the Bengali author Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay's 1966 Tagore biography, *Rabindrasmriti* (Reminiscences on Tagore). Apparently, Tagore had shared the original ending of

12 J. Lacan, 2002, 233.

13 Unlike a living subject who tends to be a neurotic (a hysteric or an obsessional) or a psychotic or a pervert, never two of these together, a literary construct can bear traces of more than one clinical structure, as Lacan indicated when he said that Hamlet was at once an obsessional and a hysteric:

People have said that Hamlet's desire is an hysteric's desire. This is perhaps quite true. Other people have said that it is an obsessive's desire. That, too, might be argued, for it is a fact that he is full of psychasthenic symptoms, even severe ones. But that is not the point. In truth, Hamlet is both. [...] Hamlet, as I told you, is not this or that, is neither an obsessive nor an hysteric (Lacan: 2013/2019, 289–295).

the novel with Margaret Elizabeth Noble, an eminent social activist in India of Irish origin popularly known as Sister Nivedita. She was intently following the story in *Prabasi* and was curious to know the ending from the author ahead of its publication. Tagore is reported to have told Mukhopadhyay that Nivedita was deeply disappointed to discover that the novel had a sad ending— sad in the sense that Gora was not united with Sucharita in that version. Nivedita is supposed to have persistently pleaded to Tagore to change the ending, imploring that what did not happen in reality ought to happen at least in fiction. Nivedita's insistence that fiction ought to depict as possible that which is impossible in reality may well have had a relation to the fact that her own love for the renowned Indian sage, Swami Vivekananda, did not attain fruition in marriage as the latter wanted to remain an ascetic. According to Tagore, she was so unrelenting that he was forced to alter the ending. In other words, the story of Anandamoyee's wish-fulfilment was at least partly catalysed by Tagore's attempt to vicariously fulfil Nivedita's unfulfilled wish in reality. What, then, was the original ending of *Gora*? The following passage from Mukhopadhyay's text would give us an idea:

Yes, I had attributed a sad ending to the story. After the marriage of Sucharita and Gora had been finalised, the truth that Gora was an Irishman came to be known. Whatever Gora may have been by birth, he was a proud flag-bearer of Hinduism by faith. Faced with this insurmountable truth, Gora was completely dumbfounded. At that moment Sucharita entered the room. She looked at Gora and said— "I have accepted you as my guru; please tell me what to do in this situation. I shall do whatever you would want me to." Gora could not reply to this. He remained seated as he was. Sucharita waited in silence; then, not getting a reply, she touched his feet in pranam [a gesture of respect] and left the room.¹⁴

Gora, thus, describes the blossoming of the protagonist's neurosis which culminates not in a neurotic resolution but in a perverse one. This structural mismatch, which is the price Tagore had to pay for his decision to radically change the course of the

ending of the novel from the originally intended tragic one at the very last minute, is properly discernible only when the novel is ruthlessly probed with the support of Lacan's teaching on the clinical structures.

14 B. Mukhopadhyay, 1966, 74. My translation.

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Speaking bluntly

Sarah Rice

If words had a weave we would feel when our lover spoke
to us in hessian when we needed satin taffeta, and more subtle
vocal fibres, the inflection of cashmere over merino or mohair.
Or perhaps better, if words spoken could be felt like Braille,

a sensitive perception of the digits, under the fingertips, six
dots raised, pin-pricks really but the pattern is all. If the sound
of the letter felt inside the cheek could have its sharpness tested
by tongue and teeth, before the utterance leaked out, before lips parted

company, we could test the word for bitterness, the way we test a grape,
sucking on the sour fruit in the dark fist of the mouth, holding it
against the light to examine its translucence. Clarity and obscurity
are measurements of density, the length of a word's shadow, its resistance

to light, how sure-footed it is in the dark. Sometimes it seems impossible
that speech is spoken by the likes of tongue and lips, those bodily blood-
filled servants to flesh and heart, hatred and dreams. If words were guests
only in the mouth, surely we would send them forth full and warm,

and perhaps they would carry our message with more care. Words stick
in our teeth like peppercorns. We are so very aware of the rough
edges of the apple core against our mouth's sore corner, of the tough
leather bay leaf left in by mistake, or the softness of silken tofu.

Our lips know for certain the thick ceramic mug and the thin porcelain rim.
We are so good at discerning too stale, too salty, too dry, or too hard.
If we could ink up our words like a thumb-print, analyse the friction
ridges, pick up the underlying interface of the epidermis, the better to transmit

signals, the evidence would present not the word itself but its pressure,
and through impression – intention, weight. Words put their hands on us
and press. Speech leaves its imprint, a smoky graphite smudge
with its map of thin white lines where the fine print lies.

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