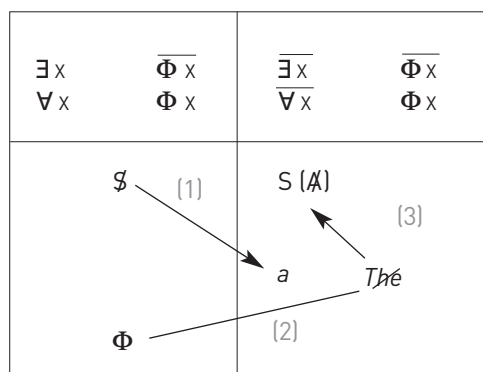


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Patrick Monribot

“There is no sexual relation” What does it mean? Clinical Consequences of Lacan’s formulae of Sexuation

The following paper was presented on the 28 September 2013 in Dublin as part of the ICLO-NLS Annual Seminar “The Names of the Real in the 21st Century”. Patrick Monribot is an Analyst Member of the School and a member of the New Lacanian School.





LACAN presented the formulae of sexualisation in March of 1973, in chapter VII of his Seminar *Encore*. These formulae must be read together with two previous writings from the *Ecrits*: “The Signification of the Phallus” (1958) and “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality” (1960).

General Aspects

IN *Seminar XX* Lacan presents different modalities of the proposition “there is no...”. *The woman does not exist and there is no sexual relation between the sexes, in the sense that such a relation “does not stop not being written”*.

The sexual relation is impossible in terms of writing. What that means is that in the psyche, there are several modalities of *jouissance*, but nothing allows for a ciphering that would connect the two sexes. Such a *jouissance* — which would be the *jouissance* of the relation between the two sexes — is foreign to subjectivity: it does not exist. Already in 1894, Freud indicated that sexuality produced a ‘hole’ in the psychical apparatus. That is, the sexual relation is a pure Real and remains irreconcilable with the subject. This does not exclude the erotic encounter between men and women. On the contrary, the impossible writing of the relation pushes towards the search for sexual encounters. But sexual encounters are not a necessity for the metabolism of human libido: when these encounters take place, they occur in an aleatory way, one that is not programmed, and that always depends on contingency.

This idea of the ‘non-relation’ is not new for Lacan. He had already evoked the false evidence of the sexual act in his Seminar *Logic of the fantasy*¹. He returns to this topic in the Seminar *From an Other to the other*² and also in “Television”³.

However, the Seminar *Encore* is a breakthrough on the topic: the formulae of sexualisation are mathemes that write the separation between men and women. Ultimately, it is a writing of the impossibility of writing of the sexual relation at the level of the psychical structure.

In analytic treatment, the subject must explore the full range of the ‘possible’ in order to perceive this ‘impossible’. Lacan proceeds according to this very same movement. In order to address what “there is no such thing as” — the sexual relation — he must start from “there is such a thing as”. Lacan reminds us of this many times in the form: “There is such a thing as One (*Ya d’l’Un*).”⁴.

1 Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book XIV, The Logic of Fantasy*, lesson of April 12, 1967. Unpublished.

2 Lacan, J., *Le Séminaire, livre XVI, D’un Autre à l’autre*, Seuil, Paris, 2006, p. 207.

3 Lacan, J., “Television” in *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, transl. by D. Hollier et al, Norton & Co, New York/London, 1990, p. 8.

4 Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book XX, Encore*, transl. by B. Fink, Norton & Co., New York/London, 1998, p.5.





Of the One, but No Sexual Relation

THIS statement is not new for Lacan. He had said it at least six times in his Seminar of the previous year, *Ou Pire... [Or worse...]*.

"There is such a thing as One" means that there is jouissance, but that this jouissance is always 'One'. Jacques-Alain Miller, in his course on the "Paradigms of jouissance", enumerated the possibilities of jouissance. In the last paradigm, he gives the whole series of possible "One-jouissances"⁵.

Jouissance is the property of a living body; it is the substance of the living being – Aristotle would say that it is matter. Lacan demonstrates that the only possible jouissance for the living body is fundamentally 'One'.

First of all, this means that the One is not a jouissance that allows for "universal fusion"⁶.

Secondly, it means that there are not two different, complementary jouissances: a feminine jouissance and a masculine one. This is close to the Freudian idea that there is only one libido, which is always essentially phallic, regardless of the person's sex. Human libido is a mode of 'One' jouissance and nothing more.

If an 'Other' form of jouissance exists in the body, as we may see in women, that means that this jouissance is not directly linked to the exercise of libido, and that it does not participate in the erotic or genital exchange between partners. We will examine this point on the right-hand side part of the formulae, which deal with feminine jouissance. In short, the 'One' jouissance is opposed to the 'Other' jouissance (with a capital 'O'). Certainly, erotic foreplay may concern the body of the other (with a small 'o'), of a fellow human being who functions as a partner. However, erotic jouissance does not pass through the Other with capital 'O', Lacan argues, which must be distinguished from the small 'o'. The distinction between the partner as other with a small 'o' and the Other with a capital 'O' poses a problem. At the time of *Seminar XX*, Lacan defines the Other as being the Other sex. So we have to distinguish between the other with small 'o', which is the sexual partner, and the Other with a capital 'O', which is the "Other sex"⁷. How can we understand this distinction?

The sexual partner can be your partner, but what is the Other sex — with a capital 'O'? Lacan tells us that it is the feminine sex. But it is not the 'opposite' sex, as the term is commonly used: a man for a woman and vice versa.

Basically, the only possible jouissance emerging from sexual intercourse is a jouissance proper to each of the bodies of the couple. It is a 'One' jouissance, phallic, libidinal and always short-circuited from the Other sex labelled feminine. Human sexuality in the sense of sexological practices is separated from the Other

5 Miller, J.-A., «Paradigms of Jouissance», transl. by J. Jauregui, in *Lacanian Ink*, Issue 17, Autumn, 2000, pp. 10-47.

6 Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book XX, Encore, op. cit.* p. 10.

7 [TN: In English it is called "the opposite sex" rather than "the other sex".]





sex. The possibility of a link of jouissance with the Other sex is a dead end and a failure. Even if the Other sex enjoys, this jouissance does not establish a bond.

What consequences does this have? Satisfaction obtained by each of the partners making love together, are nothing but two 'One' jouissances rubbing up against each other in the same place and at the same time — nothing else! It is the meeting of two 'One' jouissances that remain separate from one another. Each enjoys his or her own jouissance, but not the partner's jouissance. The couple's shared jouissance — as a cipher for the sexual relation in a human being's symbolic structure — does not exist.

The only permitted way to establish an erotic bond is for each partner to bring his or her own phallic jouissance to the sexual encounter.

In addition, phallic jouissance is a semblant. Note that this does not mean that the partners act 'as if' or pretend to enjoy themselves in bed, but that erotic jouissance uses the mediation of two elements in order to be achieved, two elements which Lacan qualifies as semblants: they are the object *a* as surplus-jouissance (which is a semblant of the real) and the 'One' in the form of a particular signifier: the Symbolic phallus. Now, these two terms belong to the category of the semblant: they come to replace the mythical jouissance of the sexual relation if it would have existed. This is what Lacan tries to express when he says "there is no sexual relation".

And there is no phallic jouissance, no erotic practice, no jouissance called 'One' — with or without a partner — that would be able to fulfil the fundamental flaw of sex, the "inexistence of the sexual relation", because the sexual relation is a pure real which cannot be inscribed in a symbolic form. No effort at subjectivising it can remedy it. No signifier, no knowledge, no science can write this absent relation.

In the place of the impossible relation, we have the whole catalogue of 'One' jouissances, to try to attain an erotic bond with a partner. Science has confused relations between the sexes with the erotic relation between partners. Science tries to make people copulate in scanning machines. We will know more about the biology of the 'One' jouissances of each partner, but we will remain ignorant regarding the Other jouissance, that Other jouissance which would exist if the sexual relation could finally be written by science. This cannot be done, since what the image visualises (whether pornographic or radiographic) is the 'One' jouissance. The jouissance we call 'One' lends itself to scientific study, to knowledge, to measure and ciphering.

In the series of the possible jouissances we call 'One', Lacan distinguishes above all masturbatory jouissance (which he calls the "jouissance of the idiot"), that is to say, cut off from relation to the Other. This is the paradigm of phallic jouissance. Let us note that it is not so much the subject who enjoys during masturbation: it is the organ itself. In his *Écrit* on the signification of the Phallus, Lacan speaks indeed of a "cult of the organ".





Lacan's thesis on the 'non-relation' is the following. In mathematics, to write a relation, you need two terms. This is precisely what humans lack, as they only have one term to deal with in sexual exchange: the phallic function. Men and women have no choice: it is from the phallic function alone that they will have to distinguish one another.

To sum up, in all cases — except those of psychotic madness — the phallus is the single and compulsory regulator of sexual exchange. A single term — the Phallus — is insufficient to write a relation for both partners.

However, this single term is enough to differentiate two different positions before the phallic jouissance. It is thanks to this, Lacan says, that the "two halves of humanity" are differentiated. They are differentiated *from* the phallic function.

The Two Halves of Humanity

Misunderstanding

THE formulae of sexualisation are presented as two separate columns. One half "of humanity" is in the left-hand column: men. And the other half is in the right-hand column: women. But here it is not anatomical difference or marital status that rules the separation. Nor is it the signifying designation of a type, such as the one we can read on the doors of public toilets — 'gentlemen', 'ladies'. The difference between the sexes depends upon the position occupied in relation to the phallic function above each column.

Below, in the lower part, we find the organisation of jouissance for each sex. Certainly, there are links between the two columns, but they do not write a relation. They write the misunderstanding between the sexes. These ties are materialised by arrows.

The misunderstanding means that the jouissances proper to each half are discordant with each other. Let us say that the arrows allow for a relational 'bricolage' between the two sexes — especially via the fantasy — but nothing more. Basically, the formulae write a separation and a radical solitude, hence there is a misunderstanding in the couple's sexual encounter, even when the sexual act was a success!

On the 'man' side

ON the left, male subjects reduce all of their experiences of jouissance to that of the "One jouissance" [*jouissance Une*], in this case phallic — above all, jouissance of the organ.

When we speak of 'male subject', we must qualify it. It does not matter whether the concerned subjects are, from the anatomical or civil status, male or female. As subjects, $\$$, we are always on the left side of the formulae, that is to





say, on the 'male' side of sexualisation. This is why Lacan places the matheme of the barred S on the left side, and it cannot be found on the other side. This means that a female subject is also necessarily concerned by this so-called 'masculine' code. As subjects of the unconscious, we are always on the left side, whether one is a man or a woman. Things get more complex for us with the notion of the "Other sex" — situated in the right column — which is reserved for femininity. The Other sex, feminine by definition, is not equivalent to the feminine subject, since the subject (even the feminine one) is always located in the left-hand column.

The subject is always confronted with the bar of castration, that is, with the limit imposed on sexual jouissance by the phallic function. The phallus allows for sexual jouissance, but it limits it. For instance: in the search for jouissance, a subject — man or woman — may only search for objects a , which is shown by arrow number (1), and which goes from the barred subject, $\$$, towards the small a . Essentially, this arrow is equivalent to the formula of the fundamental fantasy formulated by Lacan long before: $\$ \diamond a$.

Obviously, there are differences according to sex. For example, in his Seminar *Les non dupes...*, Lacan situates children as object a for women, whereas a woman may be an object a for a man. To say that a woman takes her child as object a , means that she is not completely or wholly dedicated to her masculine partner. There is already a certain division.

How does this column work? The mathematical property that brings together the subjects in the left column is extracted from the logics of Frege, a specialist in set theory, founded by Cantor. The principle can be summarised as follows: every subject in the male set — in the left-side column — is subjected to castration, that is to say, to the phallic function. This is the phallic norm, embodied by the bar running through the subject. This unites a closed set we can call 'consistent', because it gathers inside the same perimeter every subject concerned with the phallic norm. The phallic norm brings together such a set because, according to mathematical logic, at least one foreign element exists that escapes the rule. What is this exception that assures the consistency of the set? Allegorically, it is the mythical father of the Freudian horde, who embodies the logical element that escapes castration. He incarnates what is 'outside-the-phallic-norm'. Thanks to this exception located outside the set, the phallic 'male' norm (which applies to all within the set), it is possible to gather men together as a closed and consistent set.

The advantage of such a column is that castration (namely, the phallic function) allows for a certain jouissance even if it limits it. This is phallic jouissance. Moreover, any element located on this side may be represented by the emblematic signifier of the set, the Phallus. What that means is that every subject is supported by a phallic identification. In other words, the subject can count on phallic signification in order to ensure a signifying basis for his or her identifications. He or she may therefore be represented without difficulty as a sexualised being in the symbolic order.





So for the 'man' side: whether male or female, the subject is sexually representable by phallic signification; the advantage being that he or she can be represented by big *Phi*, Φ , which is relatively comfortable.

On the 'woman' side

ON the right-hand side, the side of woman, are those — him or her — who cannot make themselves be represented, in their totality, by the phallic signifier. More precisely, this side coincides with the feminine part of the speaking-being — that which is not reducible to a position as a subject — which is always located on the left.

The above mentioned "Other sex" is thus the non-subjective and non-subjectifiable part of the sexed being, a part of the speaking-being that is strictly feminine. In sum, in her dimension as subject, a woman is on the side 'man' of sexuation, but a part of her being escapes this position as a subject. She incarnates the Other sex in the Lacanian sense of the term.

The upper part of this column shows a certain link with the phallic function, but this link invalidates the previous logic (the one on the masculine side). Indeed, the logics of 'consistency' of sets cannot be applied, as there is no exception from the norm that is able to unite the elements on the common slope of castration. As a result, we have the following: here, "not-all x..." in the set is subjected to the phallic function.

This does not mean that the elements in this category (women) escape the phallic norm. These elements are subjected to the phallic function insofar as they are barred subjects, but the feminine part of their being is not subjected to castration. Put differently, the *jouissance* said to be "specifically feminine" which Lacan also calls "Other *jouissance*", or the *jouissance* of the "Other sex" — this *jouissance* is not organised by castration.

Feminine *jouissance* is not regulated by castration but is nevertheless linked to castration. This is what the arrows that animate this *jouissance* indicate: they have a dialectical link with the column on the left. One could even say that feminine *jouissance* is only thinkable *from* phallic *jouissance*, even though it is different and separate.

The Other Sex

THE "Other sex", as feminine, is represented by the matheme: $\overline{\Phi}$. The arrows pointing from this matheme testify to the following: the "Other sex" is confronted with two modes of *jouissance*.

On the one hand, arrow (2) points at the 'One' of phallic *jouissance* in the form of capital *Phi*, showing that the feminine sex is not without a link to phallic *jouissance*.





On the other hand, the “Other sex” is confronted with an “Other jouissance”, a non-phallic one, indicated by arrow (3) and remaining in the same column. This “Other jouissance” is designated by the matheme $S(\mathcal{A})$. Such a duality of jouissance allows Lacan to deduce the notion of “not-all”.

This term has been around for some time as a logical operator in Lacan’s vocabulary. We already said that when comparing the top two rows of both columns, the phallic function does not collectivise women, due to the lack of an external exception necessary for a feminine closed set to consist. This gives us, for women, a so-called ‘open set’. Above all, this means that every woman — not as subject but as “Other sex” — will herself have the task of incarnating, ‘one by one’, the logical function of the exception that does not exist outside of the set.

This is the destiny of the feminine: if the logical exception does not exist collectively (as is the case for the masculine column), every woman must embody this function. To put it differently, for women, there is no totalising phallic grouping linked to the “at least one” of the paternal exception. Each woman has to assume the place of the exception, and this implies a structural solitude that is specifically feminine.

In this sense, feminine exception is not a comfortable privilege. Lacan goes as far as saying that one must be “gifted”⁸ to situate oneself on that side — and the fact of being a man in the civil sense, as Saint John of the Cross was, does not change the difficulty.

Women realise a series of exceptions, one by one. This series makes women exist collectively as a closed set. What exists is one woman, then another, and yet another, and so on. Series: yes, community: no!

On the other hand, we can see that the matheme of *The woman* is situated on the opposite side to the phallic symbol. Between the two there is the barrier that separates the columns. This indicates a lack of signification of the feminine being, since signification is always phallic — so it is always located on the left side. That is to say, what is located on the right side (the feminine) has no signification.

We can even say that the feminine sex, as Other sex, does not inhabit language, it is not represented there. The words with which to name it are missing. The Other sex escapes any possible subjective capture by means of the signifier. Hence the insoluble nature of the famous Freudian question: what does a woman want? What makes her enjoy? There is no signifying, symbolic answer! Let us now examine this question: what makes her enjoy?

The Failure of Man

For the man, on the left, jouissance is indicated by two mathemes: the barred subject, $\$$, and right below, the capital *Phi* of phallic jouissance.

⁸ Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book XX, Encore, op. cit.*, p. 76.





The subject, with the arrow (1), points to a partner situated on the side of the Other sex, on the right; but this partner is not really the Other sex: it is nothing but an object *a*. Indeed, there is no subject without his or her object *a*, and phallic jouissance can only point towards those objects *a*.

As we can see, masculine sexuality is reducible to the logic of the fantasy that this arrow recalls. This is to show that a woman is desired by a man. Freud calls reducing the partner to an object the “tendency to debasement in the sphere of love”.⁹ Similarly, Lacan, in his “Guiding remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality,” reminds us of the value of “fetish” that a woman may have for a man. We could do the same kind of demonstration for the female subject with regards to her libidinal orientation towards her children as objects *a*.

In any case, the arrow going from “barred S” shows it well: the Other feminine sex, located in barred ‘The’, is unreachable for the subject, whether male or female, since there is no arrow leading there. The arrow leads to the objects *a*, such that female body parts alone can be reached – breasts, thighs, eyes, gaze, etc. It is a necessary process of ‘fetishisation’ of the female body.

But make no mistake: as Lacan says, these fetishised parts are ‘asexed’, despite the fantasmatic eroticisation sought by a man. In effect, the object *a* of the masculine fantasy is always ‘asexed’, says Lacan, because with an object *a*, it is not really the Other sex that is at stake, but a simple fetish object which polarises desire and arouses phallic jouissance. In short, through his fantasy — and because of it — man does not enjoy a woman as Other sex; he enjoys her as object. We find here the impossible relation. This masculine failure is structural, but necessary for the sexual act to be successful.

For the sexual act to be successful, a woman must consent to embody this object *a*, cause of desire for a man. Otherwise, nothing happens. There is no other choice. However, this logic can produce devastating effects. Thus, Lacan argues, a woman can enter a man’s fantasy ‘without limits’, with the toxic effects we all know. This is how a man “may be a ravage for a woman”, as Lacan argued.¹⁰

This is why the object *a* appears in the right-hand column, on the feminine side: it is a possible place for a woman in relation to a man, a place different from her own position as subject. But it is not the only possible one.

As Lacan states, on the right side, “there is something else” — something beyond this position as object *a*, something that accommodates her feminine being. This “something else” is hard to name since it is close to the real. Lacan too, unable to name it, proposes to write it: *The*. However, despite everything, a man has to take this part of feminine being into account. How can he do it, since his fantasy does not allow for it?

⁹ Freud, S., «On the Universal Tendency of Debasement in the Sphere of Love» in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XI*, Hogarth Press, London, 1957, p 179.
¹⁰ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII, Le sinthome*, Seuil, 2005, p. 101.





The best he can do for a woman is to accept that she can be radically Other for him, that is, foreign to his fantasy. In other words, to accept that she is foreign to the logic of his masculine desire and his male jouissance. Lacan says that a man must “make room for the Other sex”. This means that the man consents to not reducing a woman to a fetishised object for his own desire, an object *a*.

In the end, what is “*The*”? It is “an *Other* thing” (something else), inaccessible to every subject, even during a successful sexual encounter.

This brings us to the following question: from this enigmatic position of *The*, what jouissance can a woman experience? What happens with this particular jouissance? How can we speak of that which has no signification?

Feminine Jouissance With God

THE existence of a jouissance specific to the Other sex can only be conceived from a logical work of writing, that is, from the matheme: *The*.

Here we find a little paradox to be solved. “The woman does not exist”, says Lacan. Certainly, but feminine jouissance exists in every woman.

“The woman does not exist” means that the signifier that would represent all women at the same time is absent from the symbolic register. The symbolic Other is thus barred, \bar{A} , in the sense that there is a signifying foreclosure of “The woman”. With “The woman”, there is a hole in the Symbolic.

Now, every time the speaking-being is confronted with a foreclosure, whatever it may be, it produces the eruption of a real jouissance that the speaking-being has to face. This is the case, for example, in psychosis, where the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father is accompanied by the emergence of a crazy jouissance. It is the same regarding femininity: the foreclosure of “The woman” causes the return of a jouissance that is a bit mad — and this is what allowed Lacan to state that “*All women are mad*”.

This unnameable jouissance is impossible to symbolise, even in a woman who has been analysed, even if she is a psychoanalyst. For that reason, this feminine jouissance is one of the roots of feminine ravage: it is a pure real. Feminine ravage means that there is a shortage of signifiers in the code to name the jouissance that is properly feminine, to articulate the feminine being in the symbolic order. This implies, sometimes, a certain clinic of privation or dearth in women: it is not masochism; it is a matter of foreclosure.

In fact, every speaking-being is concerned by feminine jouissance. As such, every analysand must make an effort to aim at the unnameable. This effort consists of producing a particular signifier called $S(\bar{A})$. Ultimately, $S(\bar{A})$ is a signifier that every individual must invent (or should invent) to name the real jouissance of the Other sex.





To put it another way, if “The” woman does not exist, the signifier $S(\bar{A})$ does exist: this signifier, says Lacan, “designate[s] nothing other than the jouissance of The woman”.¹¹

This signifier is not connected to the other signifiers according to the principle of the signifying chain (S_1-S_2). It is an isolated signifier that names and that, according to Lacan, has the function of the letter. Why of the letter? Because, for Lacan, the letter’s goal is to skirt the hole of foreclosure — not to mask it. The letter thus serves to limit the sometimes devastating real from emerging from this hole. Within this logic, $S(\bar{A})$ skirts the gap due to the foreclosure of “The” woman and it thus limits the toxic effects of its jouissance.

Producing this signifier in analysis, allows for treatment of the feminine ravage, since it certainly produces a ‘bordering’ effect, that is, an effect of limiting, but also an effect of nomination, which is another form of limiting. And limiting is always welcome in the clinical field, with regards to feminine jouissance, as there is always a true feminine suffering linked to the ‘unlimited’.

Limitless

WHAT happens in the column on the right, for a woman, from “*The*”? The formulae show two departing arrows (2) and (3).

Arrow (2) points towards the sexed partner, that is, the man. Indeed, this arrow leads to capital *Phi*, Φ , located in the other column. A woman thus points to capital *Phi*. This matheme has different functions.

First, it means that a woman may be interested in the penis — and that she may even fetishise it, as argued by Lacan¹². But this is not equivalent to the masculine fetishisation. A woman fetishises the organ not for the organ itself (in order to make positive the small imaginary *phi* of castration), rather she fetishises it as the embodiment of the symbolic Phallus, capital *Phi*. In his *Ecrits*, Lacan says that through the organ, she points to the signifier of her desire. She wants to get this signifier from her partner, in whom she supposes its existence, including the imaginary form of the organ.

Then, we have another function of this arrow (2). The signifier being pointed at in capital *Phi* is an S_1 destined to cipher all jouissance on the man’s side. This is how it is presented in *Seminar V*. It is very attractive for a woman who is confronted by the indecipherable of a real jouissance.

Finally, let us not forget that the barred ‘The’, does not hold the being of the subject: this term is marked by a lack of any signifying identification. Therefore, this arrow indicates an attempt to identify herself with the signifier capital *Phi*,

¹¹ Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book XX, Encore, op. cit.*, p. 84 [TN: Translation modified].

¹² Lacan, J., “The signification of the Phallus” in *Ecrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. by B. Fink, Norton & Co., New York/London, p. 583.





in order to awaken masculine desire towards her. A woman knows that a man needs a 'phallicisation' of the feminine body for him to be able to desire her, and this arrow is a way of embodying the phallus for him. It is the logic of the *girl phallus*, to use Fenichel's term. Hence the question: can a woman find identificatory support there, through this arrow (2)?

For all these reasons, a woman is connected to the phallic function. Lacan even says: "she is fully there". But, he adds, "there is something more".

That 'something more' means 'beyond' phallic signification, to the point of escaping every signification, of escaping the arrow (2) linked to the Phallus. This failure sends a woman towards the upper arrow (3) which goes from *The* towards $S(A)$. Here is where the famous "Other jouissance" [*jouissance Autre*] is experienced, the specifically feminine jouissance. That is why this jouissance is unfit for sexual exchanges between partners. It does not have the phallic signification proper to eroticism. The arrow has a trajectory entirely located on the right-hand side of the formulae. There is no possible encounter with the male subject's desire, the man's fantasy or his phallic jouissance.

What can we say of this Other jouissance located at arrow (3)? Lacan points out that it is a purely felt experience — without any words to communicate or share it. At best, Lacan invites his students to read the mystics so that they might know something about it. The mystics testify to a true joy at the time of the bodily ecstasy, a joy that for Lacan resembles this specific jouissance.

The problem is: if there is no signifier that corresponds to this jouissance, then one has to invent a signifier, in order to be able to name such jouissance. In short, it is about producing $S(A)$. Let us note that this isolated signifier has no chain effect: it is a signifier that names this jouissance, but which does not grant or release any knowledge about it. It is an S_1 without S_2 .

This poses an insoluble problem. A woman who, like the mystics, would want to express her experience in terms of knowledge, has to articulate it using the signifying chain. From the very moment a woman wants to testify to her jouissance, she is sent back again to signification. Which is to say to the other form of S_1 that the symbolic Phallus constitutes (capital Phi). So, she has no choice but to move from arrow (3) (that of the felt experience) to arrow (2) oriented towards the Phallus.

This forced return to phallic signification is a dead end, since it implies the use of more or less phallic metaphors, when in fact it is about something else. The arrow below (arrow 2) can never reabsorb the upper arrow (arrow 3): arrow (2) fails in testifying to what occurs in arrow (3).

So between the two arrows we have a dialectic of permanent oscillation: The "impossible to say" in arrow (3) pushes a woman towards arrow (2). And conversely, the failure in the manoeuvre brings her back to the unspeakable place of her real jouissance: returning her to arrow (3).

This means that one arrow cannot exist without the other. One arrow decompletes the other in a constant back-and-forth game. This toing and froing





is the movement where the “not-all” is inscribed. The “not-all” should not be confused with $S(A)$. It is the ineliminable distance between capital Phi and $S(A)$, the mobile angle between the two arrows.

This has a clinical consequence. A woman’s access to her ‘Other’, real jouissance, namely to arrow (3) of $S(A)$ forces her to make a detour via arrow (2) which leads to capital Phi – if this weren’t the case, she would be crazy. This means that for a woman to bear feminine jouissance, it is necessary that she pass by the ‘male’ side. Above all this means, at a purely clinical level, that — among other solutions — a woman may pass via a man in order to access her Other jouissance. Lacan already highlighted this in 1960 in *Guiding remarks...*¹³ A man, says Lacan, serves here as a ‘relay’ so that “a woman becomes this Other to herself, as she is to him”. For her, it is a possible means of accessing the feminine part of her being, this part so strange and foreign to herself.

In other words, in confronting the limited phallic jouissance of a man, a woman may facilitate her own access to a ‘beyond’, namely, her own feminine jouissance. This is doubtless the best a man can do for a woman he loves: to serve her as a ‘relay’.

Feminine jouissance has certainly no adequate word, but it is present at the level of the body. We can even say that it is an unlimited presence, that is: when it manifests itself, this presence is limitless. First, because it is not limited to a specific organ, such as the famous clitoral jouissance or the “G spot” — which cannot be found. These examples are anatomical localisations of female phallic jouissance and not of the Other jouissance.

Second, the Other jouissance is not limited by the pleasure principle. To put it in terms of Lacan’s *Seminar X*, no detumescence of the organ sets a limit or puts an end to it: there is no castration. In this regard, the ‘without limit’ is a factor that is anguishing or uncanny.

Finally, in all cases, this feminine jouissance is ‘supplementary’ and not complementary to any ‘One’ jouissance. The idea of a ‘supplement’ reverses the Freudian perspective of deficit. For Freud, the woman does not have the phallus and she looks for it where it is (*penisneid*). Here we are in the realms of a ‘minus’ sign for women. The ‘minus’ gives feminine jouissance an ‘incompleteness’: for a woman there is something missing, she lacks something.

On the contrary, the Lacanian notion of ‘supplement’ leads to a ‘plus’. For Lacan, this ‘plus’ gives feminine jouissance an ‘inconsistency’, which is not at all the same as the Freudian incompleteness. ‘Inconsistency’ is a mathematical term from set theory, which means that the ‘Other’ jouissance of a woman cannot establish a unifying link with the ‘Other’ jouissance of other women. At the end of the day, the series of feminine exceptions is a sum of solitudes. This series is never totalised by an algebraic addition that would constitute a whole as end result. That is the inconsistency of the series.

13 Lacan, J., “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality” in *Ecrits*, op. cit., p. 616.



Soulove¹⁴

CLINICALLY, feminine jouissance induces a particular form of love, of an 'erotomaniac' kind. It is not the psychiatric erotomania seen in paranoid psychoses, but a feminine love, as evoked by Lacan¹⁵. This love is the product of feminine jouissance as unsayable $S(\mathcal{A})$. Mystics who experienced this form of jouissance testified to an infinite love for God. More generally, through this supplementary jouissance, the feminine being joins the divine being.

We used to correlate God with the Name-of-the-Father, at the heart of the symbolic big Other. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan even says: "God is unconscious". It is very different in *Seminar XX, Encore*, for the big Other no longer has the same status: it is no longer the locus of the Symbolic. The big Other is now the locus of femininity and what is most real about it. God now has a real side that must be interpreted as "based on feminine jouissance"¹⁶.

God thus becomes a version of the Other sex in the real. Here is why the love of the mystics for God is a valid illustration of feminine love: it depends on the specifically feminine jouissance and is organised from $S(\mathcal{A})$, which names feminine jouissance. This limitless feminine love is without doubt the best clinical way to treat feminine jouissance. Unfortunately, it is not the only one. Indeed, there is an alternative: feminine jouissance and $S(\mathcal{A})$ may lead to ravage. It is either limitless love or limitless devastation and depends on the Other with which one has to deal in the real of the love partner.

A man can be, for a woman, a ravage or a relay. In a woman, the putting into play of that love requires speech, always speech, and yet more speech. A man who wants to receive love from a woman must speak to her a lot, which is equivalent to serving as a relay in accessing her own Other jouissance. Only speech, the words of the loving demand, can mobilise the signifier to reach its limit: that is, to reach the production of $S(\mathcal{A})$.

This logic is also enacted within transference love in analytic treatment, where speech has the value of a demand. For the analysand, unfolding the signifying chain, winding through the defiles of the demand, is the only way to get close to the ultimate signifier, to circumscribe the $S(\mathcal{A})$.

This is one of the reasons why Lacan said that the end of the analysis 'feminises' the speaking-being: the treatment pushes the analysand to name his or her link to the real of feminine jouissance.

We can now measure the difference between the two possible ways of metabolising the Other jouissance: love has to do with speech, whereas ravage has to do with the death drive.

¹⁴ "L'Âmour": mixture of 'soul': 'âme' and 'amour': love.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 617.

¹⁶ Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book XX, Encore, op. cit.*, p. 77.



Psychosis, Hysteria and Femininity

BEFORE concluding, a few words on differential diagnoses in relation to femininity. Lacan said: “All women are mad”. This is an effect of the “Other jouissance”, without limits; it is a jouissance that touches the real insofar as it is foreign to phallic signification. It is true that the clinic of ravage, for example, allows for confusion between femininity and psychosis, given that a psychotic ravage also exists. Diagnosis is sometimes difficult in a psychotic woman: feminine ravage or psychotic ravage? However, it is by no means the same ravage, since the feminine proximity to the real depends on the “not-all”. Femininity passes somewhat through the phallus to go beyond it.

In psychosis it is the opposite. Psychotic jouissance does not express a ‘beyond’ the phallus, but a foreclosure of the phallus, which is entirely different.

On the other hand, we must distinguish the hysteric position from the feminine position. Hysteria is often found in female subjects, and this invites Lacan to compare both positions. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan situates hysteria as an ethics “outside-of-sex” [*Horsexe*]¹⁷, in reference to *Le Horla*, a novel by Guy de Maupassant. In hysteria, this means avoiding confrontation with the Other sex and remaining on the left side of the formulae — the side of the subject and of the Phallus. A hysteric woman may want to seduce a man, true, but in fact — and above all — she goes as far as “playing the part of the man” [*faire l’homme*]¹⁸ despite her feminine appearance. She “*fait l’homme*” psychically, in the sense that the subject is always on the ‘man’ side of the formulae.

In short, Lacan says that she is *hommosexual*¹⁹, not in the common sense of homosexuality, but in the Latin sense of the word *homo-hominis*, ‘man’. This means that the eroticised love game of the hysteric is a game between men: it takes place entirely in the left column of the formulae, and avoids the Other sex located on the right-hand side. For this reason, we may say that the hysteric remains “outside-of-sex”, that is, not outside the phallus but outside the feminine side of the formulae.

This poses a question: what happens to the femininity of a hysteric woman? “Playing the part of a man” [*faire l’homme*] does not prevent the hysteric subject from being confronted by the enigma of femininity, even if she tries to run away from this enigma. For example, the hysteric waits for knowledge from the Other woman. The Other woman is always on the horizon of the hysteric’s love intrigues. But within limit: she wants to obtain knowledge about femininity, but without implicating herself in it as woman. She spares herself the troubles posed

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85 [translation modified].

¹⁸ *Ibid.* [TN: “*faire l’homme*” means “to make a man of him” and also “to play the man’s part”.]

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.





by her own femininity. She is interested in the femininity of the Other woman. That is the hysteric position.

The feminine position is strictly the opposite. A woman does not recoil before her position of "Other sex" however enigmatic this position may be. In the same way, being interested in a man does not imply for this woman to have to "*faire l'homme*". In the strictly feminine position, there is no short-circuiting of the feminine sex, as it happens in hysteria.

Thus, there is an opposition between the hysteric and feminine positions. However, Lacan softens this opposition in *Seminar XX* by saying that hysterics are still feminine subjects. This means that a hysteric woman is not-all hysteric. As a sexed being, as a speaking-being, she is also on the 'woman' side, whether she wants to be or not! On the left-hand side, she certainly "plays the part of the man". It is a virile identification with the subject. But on the right-hand side, the feminine side, she at least seeks to know something about her own feminine being, that is to say, she seeks to "know herself as Other", as Lacan puts it. To do this, she finds a solution, even if it is an inadequate and rather inefficient one²⁰.

Her attempt is a dead end, because it is an imaginary solution: she tries to identify with the Other woman. To say this, Lacan uses a strange formula with a neologism: hysterics, says Lacan, "love each other as the same in the Other"²¹. In French, the neologism "*se mêmement*", makes the verb 'love' [*aimer*] phonetically resonate with the word 'same' [*même*]. This means literally that the hysteric loves herself in her who is the same as her, as an idealised feminine figure, which she will reduce to a neighbour in the mirror, in the hope that she will get to know a bit more about her own femininity.

For example, an illustration of this strategy is Dora's quest, as she loses herself for hours in Raphael's painting of *The Sistine Madonna* at the Dresden Museum. Dora tries to search her feminine being via specular narcissism. She looks for a feminine identification via the imaginary.

However, Dora deploys another strategy towards Mrs K, her father's mistress. Certainly Mrs K fulfils for Dora the function of "the Other woman", but this does not serve to find in Mrs K a feminine identification. It is something else: the subject, Dora, searches for an object (in the sense of object-relation) in which she is extremely interested, an object here embodied by Mrs K.

Indeed, Dora organises complicated love intrigues with the Ks – intrigues in which Mrs K plays a central role – to obtain knowledge of feminine jouissance. But in the end, these are intrigues in which Dora is hysterically implicated. She "plays the man's part", as Lacan has shown. Contrary to what happens with the Madonna in the painting, what is at stake for Dora with Mrs K is not reaching her feminine being, but reaching a knowledge about femininity, *from* a masculine position. Dora does not want to be a woman; she wants to know about the woman.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²¹ *Ibid.*, [TN: In French, the text reads, "*se mêmement dans l'Autre.*"]





Thus, with Mrs K incarnating “the Other woman”, Dora activates her hysteric side: she plays the man’s part and she remains on the left side of the formulae. Whereas facing the Madonna as a figure of “the Other woman”, Dora activates her feminine side: she seeks her feminine being rather than knowledge. That is to say, she seeks a way into the column of femininity on the right-hand side, an issue that is not posed for her with Mrs K.

The problem is that Dora’s narcissistic pathway facing the painting is a dead end. It is nothing but an identification, which can say nothing about the real of a woman’s jouissance and does not allow access to this jouissance. Nevertheless, it is Dora’s attempt to reconnect with her own femininity. But in fact, as “Other to herself”, Dora can only experience her femininity from her own body, even if this strange experience does not provide her with any knowledge about “the thing”. As Lacan states: “...there is no need to know you are Other, to be there”²².

In short, Lacan tries to tell us that the choice of virile identification is not the only or the final one for a hysteric woman. Femininity continues to question her, hence the permanence of the fundamental question that agitates the hysteric subject: “Am I a man or a woman?” This is a question that sometimes requires a long analysis.

**Translated from the French by Florencia F.C. Shanahan.
With thanks to Phil Dravers.**



²² *Ibid.*

