

Aliens, This Way Please

It is fitting that this group New Studies on Hysteria which is hosting this Conference today has had no permanent place of domicile since its inception.

For quite some time, the Milltown Institute offered us a place of refuge but due to its imminent closure we are once again searching for a place in which to work.

Some of you will recognise something of the same kind of situation in which Lacan found himself in Nov. 1963 when he was finally excommunicated (a word he himself uses) from the International Psychoanalytic Association. To be more precise, Lacan's teaching had been the object of censure and a ban on this teaching ensured that he would never again be sanctioned by the I.P.A. Lacan regarded this as tantamount to excommunication. This is of course a religious reference and excludes the possibility of a return within the Jewish tradition while the Christian tradition delights in the one who has been lost coming back to the fold.

Lacan was devastated by the decision of his being the "subject of a deal" which was finally taken on Nov 1963 and he seems to have concluded that his teaching role was at an end. He was to begin his 1963-4 Seminar on the Names of the Father that year. He was reduced to silence. But quickly he found his courage and found too that his desire was stronger than anything that an Institution could impose on him and by January 1964 he had been given a new teaching position.

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In this search for a place in which to conduct his seminars, he once again begins to question what is psychoanalysis? If he begins with the religious register and asks what is it about the psychoanalytic community that is so reminiscent of religious practices, it is because this question is useful for him as he begins his seminar and that “Psychoanalysis, whether or not it is worthy of being included in one of these two registers, may even enlighten us as to what we understand by science and even by religion”.¹ This involves a lot of presuppositions which Lacan begins by questioning the conceptual status we give to four of the terms detailed by Freud, namely the unconscious, repetition, the transference and the drive. And so the title of this Seminar by Lacan is The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.

Now, Lacan says something very interesting at the beginning of this seminar which always struck me as fundamental and that is “There was something in Freud which was never analysed”.² Charles Melman, answers the question because he says that it was from the moment that Lacan began to speak about Freud’s desire and about the relationship of Freud to the names of the Father that he was to find himself excluded from the International Community. He never did give his Seminar on the Names of the Father!

So we appreciate that exclusion has consequences. As you are aware a small group of ten of us have been studying Melman’s New Studies on Hysteria for nearly 3 years now and as Lacan says it was through the hysterics that Freud learned the way of the strictly Freudian unconscious. Freud did not stop there and Lacan places his desire at a higher level. It’s like as if the hysteric was the passeur for Freud – he would not have got through only for the hysteric.

¹ Lacan J. The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. Seminar XI
Trans Sheridan. A. Karnac 1973. P.7

² Ibid. P. 12.

In fact Melman, speaking about the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis here in Dublin in June 1995, tells us that it took him over 30 years to understand it and states “What I managed to understand was that the structure of the whole text is organised precisely as a demonstration, a proof of what the object of psychoanalysis is, namely this objet a”.⁽³⁾ Could it not be also said that this reads like a first lecture of Lacan’s own, without the need for validation by a foreign body – (The I.P.A.)?

This is perhaps why this text carries within it so much loss, so much searching, so much that is lacking. So, in an attempt to find our bearings it will be helpful to follow Freud, as his desire lead him in Lacan’s words to “this door that (he) entered”⁽⁴⁾ and which he opened and which he called the Unconscious. Like Moses, who led the chosen people out of the wilderness Freud knew that he had to go there. Because of his tradition, as Lacan reminds us, he had been in a land where he was “merely a temporary guest”⁽⁵⁾

He followed his hunches and there, he found impediment, failure, where things don’t work. In a spoken or written sentence, something stumbles. Freud as Lacan describes it, is attracted by these phenomena, and it’s there that he seeks the Unconscious.

As Lacan underlines it, the Freudian Unconscious is not the romantic unconscious of an Imaginary creation, nor is it the place of the divinities of the night, nor some magic intuitionism that gives us a Eureka moment. What Freud found introduces something else. He reversed the notion of a

(1) The Letter – Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis Autumn 1995. Vol V. P. 29.

(2) Op. Cit. Seminar XI P. 12.

(3) Lacan J. The Freudian thing, or the meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis in *Écrits*. A Selection. Trans. Sheridan A. Tavistock Publications. 1996. P.115.

consciousness and points instead that the unconscious speaks in an even more elaborate fashion than the conscious. As Freud himself says elsewhere “the ego does not look favourably upon psychoanalysis and obstinately refuses to believe in it”.⁽⁶⁾ Things aren’t that easy to accept as Lacan comments the unconscious is an entrance that one can only reach just as it closes. And, he continues “the place will never be overrun with tourists and the only way for it to open up a bit is by calling it from the inside”.⁽⁷⁾

So let us return to the inside with Freud – so that those on the outside may not be so far away, after all! As early as Dec 6th 1896 in a letter to Fliess,⁽⁸⁾ Freud wrote about the locus where the question of the subject of the unconscious is played out. The schema of the psychical apparatus in Freud is invented to explain the phenomena of memory - of what isn’t working. What he found in this letter is that there are traces of perception which are unconscious traces and they correspond to conceptual memories. These traces Lacan called signifiers.

You are not going to ask me to drag up again this question of –repetition. Of Wiederholen, Are You ? Are you? Well – I have to – if I’m going to be true to the question of the locus of subjectivity in psychoanalysis! Traditionally, repetition has been identified with the transference, as Freud himself says “We soon perceive that the transference itself is only a piece of repetition and that the repetition is a transference of the forgotten past not only on to the doctor but also on to all the other aspects of the current situation”.⁽⁹⁾

(4) Freud S. A difficulty in Psychoanalysis in An Infantile Neurosis and other Works, S.E. Vol. XVII. A difficulty in Psychoanalysis P. 143.

(5) Lacan J. Position of the Unconscious in Reading Seminar XI. Ed. Feldstein. Fink B. Jaanus. M. Traans. Fink B. New York Press. 1960. P. 267.

(8) Freud S. Pre Psycho Analytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts to S.E. Vol I. Letter 52. PP 233 – 239.

(9) Freud S. Case History of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works S.E. Vol XII. P. 151

So that repetition has traditionally been seen as a kind of automatism of habit, as Cormac Gallagher describes it,⁽¹⁰⁾ which means that you will always choose strong men or strong women depending on the kind of relationship you have had with your parents.

But it's at exactly this point Lacan reminds us that a distinction has to be made. The Real stretches from the trauma to the phantasy. Historically, we know a lot about trauma in our country.

We will succeed in unravelling this ambiguity of the reality involved in transference if we understand something of the function of the real in repetition. There is something brutal, something impossible to tolerate about the Real. Who can explain for example, the sudden death of a loved one, of a child, of so called natural disasters, who can really say anything about these kinds of Real except to try and describe a chain of discourse around it or we can choose nothing to say, on the grounds that it might incriminate us, which is a resistance against remembering.

If the compulsion to repeat is a way of remembering, what is interesting to note is that repetition as Lacan reminds us "demands the new"⁽¹¹⁾. What is most interesting above all about is its ludic character and in this lies its true secret.

Because it is the Beyond The Pleasure Principle in action – it goes some way towards satisfying the pleasure principle, and it shows how it in its insistent demand for always something new – there is yet again rupture between perception and consciousness. This is a non temporal locus, its another locality – another scene ("Einer Änderer Lokalität") to which the subject in psychoanalysis is actually called to visit, to try and understand something of what this primary process has been doing when it left him its visiting card. We can choose to recognise this foreign place by paying close attention to this visiting card.

(10) Op. Cit. The Letter. P. 11.

(11) Op. Cit Seminar XI P. 61.

Because the reality system as Freud so clearly shows no matter how far it is developed leaves a little bit behind, in the real and makes of that real a prisoner of the pleasure principle. The signifier will never have a good enough memory to satisfy this pleasure principle and so because something is missing, the game has to begin all over again.

As Freud has said (the patient) is obliged to repeat. He explains: the repressed maternal as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, the remembering it as something belonging to the past”.⁽¹²⁾ Following Lacan we can say that “the transference is the enactment of the reality of the unconscious”⁽¹³⁾ What does this mean? Freud was at pains to point out that what he calls “the unique significance of sexual experiences in the aetiology of the psychoneuroses seem to be established beyond a doubt; and this fact remains to this day one of the corner stones of my theory”⁽¹⁴⁾

So – this means that will be played out in the transference is all the import of sexual reality. It will run beneath all that happens at the level of analytic discourse, until it reaches a point where an element will reveal itself to be lacking, which Lacan calls “unsatisfied, impossible, misrecognised, (méconnu) an element that is called desire”⁽¹⁵⁾ NB!!

Now, Lacan says something really enigmatic here. It’s that this desire to which he is now referencing is the desire of the analyst and how this desire is placed in relation to what Freud described in 1915 as a “conventional basic concept

(12) Freud S. Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works S.E. Vol XVIII. P. 18.

(13) Op. Cit. Seminar XI. P146.

(14) Freud S. A case of hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works. SE. Vol. VII. P. 273.

(15) Op. Cit. Seminar XI. P. 154.

– which at the moment is still somewhat obscure but which is indispensable to us”
(16) In other words the drive - is it not our inability to cope with these same drives that leads us into analysis in the first place?

From the very first lines, as Lacan notes, Freud makes a distinction between need such as hunger and thirst and the drive because after all hunger and thirst are satisfied when these needs are met. And, yet something insists that which Freud calls a constant force. So, that it's at the level of the drive that the state of satisfaction is to be rectified. The drive as presented by Freud in its structure means that the subject is not yet placed there and so it's a place without a subject. When Lacan spoke earlier about the entrance to the door of the Unconscious, what he had in mind at this door of entry is the subject and the Other. The Other is a place which allows the subject to be in the symbolic. The drive is essentially manifested on the side of this living being. But, this living being is also called to be a subject. But, it's from the Other that the human being has to learn to be a subject – in other words the subject depends on the signifier and the signifier is first of all in the field of the Other. It is here that the closing – the departure of the Unconscious takes place in the very same moment (which is a movement) in which the subject is called to speak. Freud's discovery, his thinking does not mean a return to the thinking of Being a'la Descartes⁽¹⁷⁾. Freud invites us to depend on something else in his cogitations, if I may express myself like this. There is a long road from thinking to Being – a long road indeed and there are not that many who are willing to take this chance, to make this choice. It's well for those whose existence is assumed – who feel confident in their individuality, their being. Psychoanalysis is for those who find that place not so self assured.

(16) Freud S. On The History of the Psycho Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works. S.E. Vol. XIV PP 117-118.

(17) Lacan J. The Logic of Phantasy 1966 – 1967. Book XIV. Trans Gallagher C. Seminar 11. P. 67.

Freud reviews our thinking totally around the relationship between thinking and being. The subject suffers from thinking Freud says, in so far as he represses it because as he says “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious”⁽¹⁸⁾ Freud goes further by warning us about the psychological damage which psychoanalysis does to our what he calls our self love, because in fact our drives cannot be totally tamed and “thoughts emerge suddenly without one’s knowing where they come from, nor can one do anything to drive them away. These alien guests even seem to be more powerful than those which are at the ego’s command”⁽¹⁹⁾

The drive in so far as it represents sexuality in the unconscious, is never anything but a partial drive that is to say that there isn’t a system of drive, it’s a fragment of activity. This fragment of activity, that is this discovery of the unconscious gives us the truth about alienation.⁽²⁰⁾ For Lacan alienation has absolutely nothing to do with the deformation, the loss that results in everything involved in communication – nor has it anything to do with the kind of alienation Marx depicted. The 1935 Irish Aliens Act, described an alien as a person who is not a citizen of Saor Stat Éireann (The Irish Free State as it’s so poignantly put). It’s interesting to note that this in turn is derived from the Aliens Act of 1905. This was an act of Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Act for the first time introduced immigration controls and registration and gave the Home Secretary overall responsibility for immigration and nationality matters.

While the Act was ostensibly designed to prevent paupers and criminals from entering the country and set up a mechanism to deport those who slipped through, one of its main objectives was to control Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. This Aliens Act remained as a fundamental legislation until 1999 when it was replaced by the Immigration Act of that year.⁽²¹⁾ Do you see how

(18) Freud S. Op Cit. S.E. Vol XIV P. 147

(19) Freud S. An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works. S.E Vol. XVII. P 141.

(20) Lacan J. Op. Cit. Seminar 25:1:1967. P.1.

(21) I’m grateful to Garrett Sheehan for his clarification of these legislative matters.

easily we assign to the rubbish heap of humanity – we reject this being, just as sure as we have put the Other in place of this questioning of Being. This is what happens when we put too much in the direction of the Other. It is no wonder then that Simon Schama, the wonderful historian at Columbia University has recently written a book about the Jews in which he says “We are a suit case people”.⁽²²⁾ We Irish understand only too well the meaning of this sentence.

The beings of these Aliens is indeed rejected, and what we get in place of this questioning of Being is the Other. So – building on a refusal, indeed a rejection we very neatly come up with the idea of an Other. We can do anything we want in the name of this Other. But, the minute it begins to fall, what happens then? what do you do with it? In other words what happens if the Other finds itself under the impact of finitude. In other words where does the good faith of the subject with the Other end? This question always remains.

Alienation for Lacan, in Seminar XI⁽²³⁾ concerns the life of the subject in a very important way. Because it has to do with making a choice – the well known example Lacan gives is your money or your life – you have to choose, you cannot have both it’s either one or the other. In this forced choice as Lacan calls it we lose something when we make this choice. We as subjects are “condemned” (Lacan’s words) to choose and then we lose something. We must choose life.

This brings me back to Lacan’s excommunication. He found himself at the Others whim, being the subject of a deal. When he lost his place in the I.P.A. and of course many colleagues and students he assumes this loss for himself, for psychoanalysis and for his teaching. Perhaps, he was not so alienated after all, because he went on to found his own school and to continue working, to follow his desire.

(22) Schama S. The Guardian Books Interview 7th Oct 2017.

(23) Lacan J. Op. Cit. Seminar XI. PP 203 - 215.

Depending on which one we choose – this forced choice, one or the other, we end up with what Lacan calls an “intersection or product”, ⁽²⁴⁾ which is called separation. In other words, there is only one way out of alienation and that is through desire. We are lacking as subjects because there is no possible clear response which could answer our question especially from the M(other) and also because of what we could call the enigma of her desire. So that from the beginning we are divided between the necessary lack of being and the search for meaning in the other beginning with the M(Other). This futile attempt to regain a lost paradise is just that – futile.

Because the subject of the unconscious will only arrive on the basis of a fundamental support from the analyst, in other words, the analysand’s desire meeting with the analyst’s desire. It seems to me that if separation in analysis is able to be carried out there may be some significant consequences.

Firstly through the other desire the subject will be able to find the equivalent of what he is as subject of the unconscious, which is in fact the unconscious of the subject. In so doing, the analysand takes on the signifier but what he does with this signifier will be part of his destiny as subject. This may go unnoticed until the time is ready.

There is a limited freedom to be gained from doing a psychoanalysis. It is not true to say that the signifier in the unconscious is open to all meanings. The signifier, constitutes the subject in his freedom in relation to all meanings, but this does not mean that this is not determined by the signifier.

The lost object is a privileged object, discovered by analysis – it is the object around which the drive moves and becomes the very stuff of which you are working on in psychoanalysis. This will help the analysand to bring out what

(24) Lacan J. *ibid.* P. 213.

exactly sex means for the analysand, so that he or she will not be taken in by the (dare I say it?) the Hollywood phantasy any more which means that by this the subject now has to deal with his own lack and turn that lack and loss into something worthwhile.

To finally get back to the question raised by Lacan at the beginning, is psychoanalysis a science? He doesn't seem to me to be too worried about answering that question. But – he is really clear that it's not a religion – “Psychoanalysis is not a religion. It proceeds from the same status as Science itself”⁽²⁵⁾ He also clearly states elsewhere “We are neither for nor against any Religion”⁽²⁶⁾.

The far more important question he leaves us with is an ethical one and he asks himself this question: “How can we be sure that we are not imposters”⁽²⁷⁾ That's a question only each one can answer for himself. As Lacan says at the end of his Seminar on The Ethics of Psychoanalysis “Of him who ate the book and the mystery within it, one can in effect, ask the question, is he good, is he bad? The question now seems unimportant. The important thing is not knowing whether man is good or bad in the beginning; the important thing is what will transpire once the book has been eaten”.⁽²⁸⁾

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(25) Lacan J. Op Cit. Seminar XI P265.

(26) Lacan J. The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious in *Écrits*. Op. cit. P. 316.

(27) Lacan J. Op. Cit. Seminar XI. P. 263.

(28) Lacan J. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. (1959 – 1960). Book VII. Ed. Miller J.A. Trans. Porter D. P. 325.