

ANXIETY: Preserving the *objet a*

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Lacan makes it clear in his *Seminar on Anxiety* that anxiety is a phenomenon, that it has an object and moreover there seems to be a precise place where we can locate this phenomenon.¹ But to do this we need to understand a little of how the subject comes into being and how in turn the subversion of the subject will come about. But this in turn will necessitate our having to confront our own anxiety, and who likes to have to do that? The coming into being of the subject will necessarily involve him in *jouissance* but this kind of enjoyment as such is really forbidden to the speaking being. But it is through this *jouissance* that we can begin to learn something about our indebtedness to the Other, because of something having been lost – this lost object which Lacan came to name the *objet a*.

Two questions arise at this time – what is the object and what does to subvert the subject imply? This is a question which cannot be arrived at fully at this stage but it is fair to say that the object in question is the *objet a*, the object which causes our desire and that the subversion must be a little like turning the back to the front, - the reversal that Freud has shown to take place with the Uncanny.² This will involve the doubling around of all the old familiar things, including the ego itself, into something else which we can see in a completely new way and which may involve our having to take a step back into another area of darkness, where vestiges of childhood pain and anxiety lie dormant. We then realise that we are in familiar territory.

But, we will do everything in our power to avoid having to confront this anxiety – because when we get too close this object which causes our desire we know that we too may be easily made not necessary, turned into a spare part. This notion of a spare part implies that somewhere there is a model which is functioning but which may become obsolete, made not necessary, and which could be easily replaced by a spare part. It is not the spare part itself that is in question, especially so today in our modern age where all sorts of gadgets are available to us, but the notion of what might ensue if we as subjects were determined in relation to a spare part, that is, in relation to something which could easily replace us.

This question of the spare part brings us to the kernel of the situation, as it were, because somewhere we know that the image which we have of ourselves is characterised by a lack and this lack could suggest that we need the spare part to complete us. So that we would like to have there in that image of ourselves cannot appear there. Of course, while this may cause us to ask what it is that would fulfil our lack, the least we can say is that desire is there. This desire is hidden but is instead judged by the absence of the *objet a*, the object which constitutes our question and is, therefore, part of our desire. The question we have about ourselves is related not to something hidden but to the absence of the object since – if we knew the answer we'd have the object – that is what the phantasy fulfils for us and is in fact

¹ J. Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*. Book X. *Anxiety 1962-63*. Trans. C. Gallagher (unpublished).

² S. Freud. *The Uncanny*, S.E., XVII. Pp. 217-252.

the function of phantasy. We make something, the object, appear in fact on the phantasy there where in reality it cannot appear (but in phantasy it can and does).

When we say that in the specular image, not everything is invested with libidinal energy by that we mean there is something left over, the 'libidinal reserve' – (the minus phi) as Lacan puts it. This something left over is in fact deeply invested with energy at the level of one's own body, at the level of primordial enjoyment which is always too much enjoyment (autistic *jouissance* is what Lacan calls it) – the 'left over' bit will later serve to intervene in the relationship the subject will come to have with the Other – with the truth of the subject one could say, - but this Other will begin in turn with the image of the other, *mon semblable*, another like myself and in an intimate relationship, the Other will henceforth ratify the image of the other as my *semblable*.

Anxiety will arise in this libidinal reserve because of our relationship with the Other – that which Freud called castration anxiety. Freud shows us that for example...

...the anxiety felt in animal phobias is therefore, an affective reaction on the part of the ego to danger; and the danger which is being signalled in this way is the danger of castration. This anxiety differs in no respect from the realistic anxiety which the ego normally feels in situations of danger, except that its content remains unconscious and only becomes conscious in the form of a distortion.³

Castration anxiety then, for Freud seems to be the prototype of all anxiety and it is before this that the neurotic comes to a halt.

Lacan, however, is going to nuance this Freudian point more subtly because he says that what the neurotic comes to a halt before is not castration anxiety but what the neurotic is thwarted in is 'from making of his castration something positive which is the guarantee of this function of the Other'.⁴

If we take the Other's function as ratifier and authenticator of the subject's very existence, then what the neurotic is reined in by is allowing this Other to indeed ratify his castration. It is almost as if the subject knows he is castrated but he does not wish the Other to be the witness to this fact. What stops the neurotic from wishing to have the Other authenticate his castration? The answer is enjoyment – *jouissance* – and so the subject will talk about his destiny and he will enter into a world of signification, that is, a world of rationalisation and meaning and so on. This he does because he does not wish to come to a rendezvous with the Other because that would put a stop to his tracks as it were – but analysis will bring him to this rendezvous, so that this famous castration which Freud talks about is nothing other than the moment in which castration has been interpreted.

Meanwhile the subject is caught because he won't approach the Other as long as he can enjoy (his symptom for example) since *jouissance* is a distraction. He, meanwhile, is looking for a signifier that will help him to understand, but, that signifier continues to be lacking while he is enjoying his symptom, and so he continues to top up with more and more

³ S. Freud. *Inhibitions Symptoms and Anxiety*, S.E., XX, p.126.

⁴ J. Lacan, op.cit., Book X.

enjoyment. But the analyst calls on him when he does make the appointment by topping up with a sign which the analyst makes to him, this sign will come from his own castration, that is from the kernel of his being which is embodied in his story.

Of course this castration is certainly in the Imaginary, at this juncture, so that the psychoanalyst's journey will entail going from Imaginary castration to what castration is properly speaking, that is, Symbolic castration. The study of the phenomenon of anxiety will be a means of finding our way along this path.

The minimal definition of anxiety that we can give, as Freud did, is to say that it is a signal. Anxiety functions as a signal of the uncanny most especially and this feeling of uncanniness is in turn linked very specially to the function of the signifier. Man's home in the true sense of the word is always someplace else, beyond the image of which we are made, and this place which is Another place tells us continually that while we are here, our true home is absent. But, let us suppose, (and this indeed sometimes happens), that this absent place reveals itself as presence to us, - then the kingdom of the Other is revealed to us. It will make off with the real image which supports our being and so there is nothing left but the specular image which, because it has no real image to support it, becomes the image of the double. This of course brings with it an awful strangeness and makes us appear to ourselves as an object by the very fact of revealing to us how quickly our subjectivity can vanish.

If we don't panic too much, are patient and have courage at the juncture, a couple of interesting things could ensue from this experience of *Unheimlichkeit*. Hegel says man's desire is desire of the Other (and indeed Lacan agrees with him on this point), with the addendum that Man's desire is desire *in* the Other insofar as the subject can only locate his Man's desire by exiling himself from his subjectivity for a while. This allows one to begin to understand what signifiers have been attached to the subject's being, to enable it to be a subject. This is a long and tortuous truth just like the truth of a story - any uncanny story - and one had to lose oneself in it. Now each one may take this detour, that is lose oneself in the story, but the only way one can accede to one's desire is by substituting oneself always for one of one's own doubles, in other words, by putting oneself there where one of one's doubles could appear. This entails a certain positioning of the subject with regard to the specular image in such a way that the double can be eclipsed. This perhaps cannot be fully spoken about here because it will only be properly articulated in the speaking of the 'full word', that is, where one understands all the conflicts that have gone to make up those doubles and where the subject can literally see himself. In this way and in a paradoxical fashion, we are brought to the point of exactly *not* losing ourselves in the story. The Other then will not reign supreme and will fall away stupefied before the very object that one is - this is, in fact, another way of describing the phantasy. When the Other has been eclipsed things come into their proper place once again so that the *objet a*, cause of desire, is there where I cannot see it and I have taken up my position as barred subject again, $\$ \Delta a$. In other words, I have put the proper distance between myself and my object because I have put myself in a perspective in relation to any one of my doubles. This happens if I am neurotic. The pervert has a different kind of relationship to the Other in that he offers himself in a faithful fashion to the too much enjoyment of the Other, - he allows the Other to enjoy him *too much*.

Of course the thorn in our side is that neurotics have perverse phantasies insofar as what appears there where the Other has been eclipsed is something like the *objet a* which

appears instead of the real image. This is a way of dealing with anxiety and is in fact a form of acting out. But this *objet a* which appears there is a false one - a little one that the neurotic holds in reserve and which is in fact a little nothing.

It is this little nothing which protects us against anxiety and yet it is something by means of which we hold on to our friends, our loved ones. It keeps us in circulation. It is the phantasy.

The phantasy is a little nothing which when it is generously given is not hard for the Other to swallow. It goes down very easily and keeps transference flowing through the veins like good rich blood. But in certain circumstances it becomes difficult to ingest, it then may get stuck in the gullet and so becomes impossible to digest. When Breuer received the gift of her nothing from Anna O - what did he do? Well, he took fright and like the good respectable *bourgeois* gentleman that he was, he fled! But, if we as analysts make ourselves a little bit harder to have than Breuer, if we *père-severe*, we will be able to make a rational use of the transference, and go the road of psychoanalysis.

This is the gift of the neurotic - to be able to transpose the function of the *objet a* into the Other, but the other side of this coin is that it turns very quickly into a demand. That is in fact the *raison d'être* of the object in the phantasy - to function as a demand. Because the true object the neurotic is looking for is a demand, he wants the analyst to make a demand on him, he wants to be begged to give up the object, which remember is a false object - a little nothing - but he does not want to pay the price - because that would mean that he would have to give up on the little thing he holds in reserve. But by not giving up on it he in fact makes it appear all the more sacrificial. There is evidence *par excellence* of this in the well-known phantasy of oblativity - of offering up, which is widespread in moralistic religious preaching as Lacan reminds us.⁵ But the reality is that the so-called moralist wants to give nothing because the real issue is that he has difficulty in receiving. Instead he wants to be begged again and again but he does not want to pay the price. The irony is that perhaps it could really work if he really wished to give something.

But, this little tablet laid at the altar of sacrifice, this little nothing, is in fact his anxiety. 'The neurotic will not give his anxiety'.⁶ When he comes to the rendezvous of analysis maybe then he will begin to give up his symptom a little. And that is why, as Freud has shown, an analysis begins by a putting into place and shape of the symptom.

When the person makes manifest his symptom then the analysis can begin. This is done in the following way: - the subject enters analysis and he makes you a false offer - of his good 'intentions', his docility, his being totally enamoured with you, - and what does the analyst do? Well, he accepts this offer but he lays that little something in reserve - his patience and his *agalma*, - the method by which the subject will in reality dig his own grave. He will do this because the analyst will demand nothing of him, contrary to his expectations, and so he will begin to moderate his own demands which come from the Other. It is insofar as we leave the demand unanswered that aggression is produced, and this is a good effect because the relationship to the specular image will be thereby put into question. It is because the demand is ultimately born out of a rage against the specular image that a series of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

demands will from then on be articulated which always goes back, in a regressive fashion, to a more original demand which was addressed to the Mother. Consequently what is arrived at in analysis is a transportation of the subject to that Other place where the potential of truth is situated. While this may appear a *regression* it is in fact a *progressive* step, because by going back to the oral phase one does indeed separate out the phallic relationships but that does not mean that one has then to retrace one's steps in the opposite direction. Analytic experience in fact shows the contrary to be true, because it shows that it is not what Lacan calls 'a genetic reconstruction'⁷ that is involved. If it were so, then that would entail of course going forward again from the oral to the phallic relationships, but what analysis reveals is that when we have exhausted to the very end all the forms of demand, including the demand for annihilation - for death - for the no-thing, what we then stumble upon is the subject's relationship to castration. Castration will be found there to the extent that the register of demand is exhausted. Castration is found there because it introduces the question of lack and therefore, of course, desire.

Freud reminds us in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* that 'anxiety is the reaction to the felt loss of the Object'.⁸ He, however, reminds us that we must go beyond 'this question of loss of objects'.⁹ He also indicated to us in this article that if there is too much stimulation it needs to be disposed of. Lacan, following Freud, is going to nuance this and translate it into his own manner of speaking about anxiety by saying that 'anxiety is not the signal of a lack but it is in fact the absence of the support of a lack'.¹⁰

In other words the lack functions in some way as a support for the subject- it is not nostalgia for the maternal womb which creates anxiety for the subject but what creates real anxiety for the subject is the feeling that he might re-enter it. We get our security from presence because we understand the possibility that it could indeed be absent - in other words, presence is based on the possibility of absence. But too much presence without any possibility of lack, when the mother is always on the child's back, thereby taking away the possibility that he may be lacking - this is what causes anxiety for the child. Let us take the example of Little Hans, where it is a question of phobia or, in other words, where there is the question of the loss of his penis (because Hans' phobia is directly related to his fear of losing his penis). What Hans experiences is the too much presence of his mother's desire and that presence is felt as being powerfully exercised towards him. He felt like a 'hot-house plant' in the words of someone I know. So that his phobia became Hans' call to his father to deliver him from the all-powerful presence of his mother which signalled to him, not that he might lose his penis - but rather that the question became for Hans of what he was to do with this penis of his in the all powerful presence of his mother who was letting her desire for him be known to him. So that his phobia became a way of calling to the father to circumscribe the space in which he could move about unhampered by this powerful desire of his mother. If the object is not lacking, if the object of desire is always there, the super ego is there to question us in our failure. In other words, when we don't succeed we are laden with the gift of the super ego which we love because it tells us just how much of a failure we've been.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ S. Freud, op.cit., p.137

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ J. Lacan, op.cit., Book X, Anxiety.

So you can see that at a more basic level what we fear more than failure is success - because the object would not be missing - it would be there in all its glory. But, of course this object-cause-of-desire is always difficult to identify. It is always there and the fact that it is difficult to identify does not mean that it disappears - it is in fact always there and it plays a vital role in positing anxiety.

The *objet a* is, therefore, one of the essential modes of anxiety. How this anxiety in turn shapes the relationship we hold with the Other will play a decisive role in determining structure. We can say tentatively, in conclusion, that we can propose three possible outcomes of how we lay down our anxious being in front of the Other. The first is the outline of the perverse structure as it offers itself up to the *jouissance* of the Other; - the second concerns the neurotic as he tries to come to terms with the demand of the Other; - and the third will deal with desire both in the Other as far as anxiety is concerned and more especially where the desire of the analyst is equally implicated. So, we can understand that only a sleight of hand (in a way) separates the analyst from the pervert! The answer to this problem will be found in the position in which each puts the Other - the question still remains for all - what does the Other want from us as a subject?

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