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# Lacan's Fantasy: The Birth of the Clinical Concept

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## Abstract

The Lacanian concept of fantasy is an essential locus for the conception of subjectivity and reality in the work of Slavoj Žižek, particularly in his initial English texts from 1989–2002 (roughly from his first major book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, to *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*). Whilst looked at creatively in its various guises and extended beyond clinical applications in his vast oeuvre – e.g. toward the exploration of the social, in terms of ideological fantasy foremost, to fuller elaborations in *The Plague of Fantasies* and beyond – the conceptual heritage (from philosophical analogues to Freud's definitions and ruminations; to Freud's followers, particularly Klein; to the early works of Lacan, i.e. the scattered articles of the 1930s and 1940s as well as *Family Complexes*; and to a strictly Lacanian definition of fantasy developed in the early seminars) is in need of fleshing out within contemporary scholarship. To this end, and as part of a larger project currently underway, in the following we will trace the somewhat staggered development of the concept of fantasy in Lacan's initial meetings held at *le Centre hospitalier Sainte-Anne* between 1953 and 1961 where 'fantasy' as subjective component (as opposed to fantasies, fantasizing as such, etc.) was truly born. Ultimately, the understanding of this trajectory and the changing significations involved in conceptual evolution can broaden our insight into Lacan's (and therefore Žižek's) theoretical methodology as well as their insistence on retaining the category of subject in the philosophical tradition.

[N.B.: While the focus of the article is clearly (and almost solely) Lacan's work, emphasis has been placed on elements crucial to Žižek's formulation of the subject: e.g. why is it that "'Reality' is a fantasy-construction" (Žižek 1989: 45)?; how are we "immersed in 'reality' (structured and supported by the fantasy)" (Žižek 2002: 17)?; and how did the formula of fantasy (e.g. Žižek 1989: 44, 128, 235; Žižek 1991: 234; Žižek 1997: 160) come into being?]

### **Lacan's Return to Fantasy**

Within an announced *retour* to the personage of Freud, teased out in discussions for his students, concretized and condensed in written speeches and articles, how do we come to the level, announced at the end of the *Transference* seminar of 1960–1961, that the *notion of fantasy* developed by the man from Vienna and upheld yet altered by his early followers is for Lacan represented by, and indeed equated with, the algebraic elements of a formula (Lacan 1960–1961: 5/31/61)? And, moreover, how does it come, this growing, evolving concept, toward the end of the 1960s to be seen as providing/possessing a logical consistency? What is its role in the constitution of human subjectivity and the relation between 'man' and his 'reality' with which it interferes?

Up to the beginning of the 1950s, 'fantasy' was a somewhat peripheral term in the Lacanian edifice, used sparingly in written articles and mostly in a Freudian or quasi-Kleinian manner (favourite fantasies; obsessive fantasies; fantasmatic fears, etc.).<sup>1</sup> By the time we reach what is considered the first seminar in 1953 (and one can only assume, due to the paucity of records, in the two previous years of student dialogues on Dora and the Wolf Man held privately in Paris, that the level of development consisted of a similar elaboration), a nuance will be provided wherein fantasy shifts from the Freudian register, is bounced off against the Kleinians, 'Anna Freudians' and other established analysts, and assumes the quality of a Lacanian concept proper. That is not to say that it is simply defined and remains unchanged, as any reader of Lacan's works from separate eras or even between separate texts must recognize.

Lacan here already, in 1953, to an audience which is initially primarily students enrolled in his program (this will soon change of course, with an increase in infamy), however slowly and sparingly it may seem, problematizes the role of fantasy vis-à-vis reality, the 'real' (albeit not yet the real as order) and adjustment in the

clinical setting. The overarching issue at this stage, it seems, is the body (and hence 'self') considered as ideal totality, reflected in the general relation of man to *natura mater*, which itself is a "great fantasy": akin to the *supposed* fit in the animal world of species and environment (itself suspicious, ultimately), there is an assumed concordance between living being as whole and its surroundings which simply does not exist but which nevertheless plays a substantial role in human thought and the (re)construction of one's external world (Lacan 1988a: 149).

Against this view, Lacan maintains that the human is originally and inextricably *dislodged* due, in a process from birth (which, however, also proceeds the subject, as can be inferred from his discussions of the symbolic<sup>2</sup>), – defined as a state of helpless immaturity – to the role of an inherent "specular dialectic with the other" (Lacan 1988a: 148), i.e. subjection to/in the imaginary dimension (see Evans 2006: 84–85 for a basic overview) and the consequences of what he comes to define as the 'dual relation' [*relation duelle*], between ego and alter ego which "disrupts the maturity of the libido in man, disrupts the smooth fitting together of reality and the imaginary" (Lacan 1988a: 149). Thus man for Lacan is never, and can never be, conceivable as isolable or a totality and sexuality is moreover an 'unstuck' element in this problematic constitution (see Lacan 1988a: 146).

Thus, against a *Weltbild* of nature as consistent, in Lacan's view, man emerges with an internal inadequacy or lack of being. This inherent *unworldliness* is experienced and expressed in multitudinous behaviours – the boundless, creative, expression of different symptoms attests to this (Lacan 1988a: 29). It is the neurotic (or indeed perverse or psychotic, albeit differently) subject who, in specifically constructing a "barrier opposed to reality", is able to come up with a solution and produce a singular and specific "recourse to fancy" (Lacan 1988a: 116) which helps obviate the obligatory discomfort of being.<sup>3</sup> We see thus in the first seminar that fantasy is referred to in the context of the analysand, i.e. of what brings one to the therapist's couch, but also the stirrings of a generalized relation to the fantasmatic as *such* brewing within the encounter that is *Geworfenheit*. Ultimately, the assumption of (self-)consciousness and an attempt at mastery contain the seeds of the fantasy relation constitutive of subjectivity: within "the experience of seeing himself, of reflecting on himself and conceiving of himself as other than he is" (originally expressed in terms of the mirror stage) the fantasy frame begins to become a *structured* fact of life (Lacan 1988a: 79).

In the first seminar Lacan will quote Freud's comments in 'On Narcissism' on fantasy and discuss the fantasy aspect of the Wolf Man case; he will treat Melanie Klein, in particular her theory of the child and the role fantasy plays in it (as well as the special case of Dick); he will note the central role of fantasy among the object relations theorists generally; and we find the first indications of "fundamental fantasies which orient and direct the subject" (Lacan 1988a: 17). Yet, it is the 'unsettling' stirrings of fantasy as delineated above (not the various *fantasies*, but fantasy as such) which will evolve within the *Lacanian* conception of the term, beginning as we saw in particular relation to the imaginary constitution of subjectivity, which of course changes ground in his later seminars as the symbolic gains ascendancy and the real is (obscurely) delineated.

At issue for Lacan is the inadequacy of the (clinical, as always) goal of removing fantasy and the theory and proponents behind it, as he then saw it: something so innate cannot be suspended or overruled/ruled over and is in fact vital and unavoidable as a support. He notes in the first seminar:

Certain authors maintain that analysis is a sort of homeopathic discharge by the subject of his fantasised understanding of the world. In their view, this fantasised understanding should, little by little, within the day-to-day experience taking place in the consulting-room, boil down, transform itself, and achieve a new equilibrium within a given relation to the real. What is emphasised here, as you see, in clear contrast to Freud, is the transformation of the fantasised relation in the course of a relation which one calls, without further ado, *real*. (Lacan 1988a: 14)

Analysts since Freud have been tempted to revert to a simpler view of reality, and uphold a concomitant *Anpassung*, a fitting to norms that cannot help but be seen as ill, effectively negating the nuances of *psychic reality* – i.e. "everything which takes place between perception and the motor consciousness of the ego" (Lacan 1988a: 75) – he introduced. What here needs to be rejected for Lacan is "a certain reorientation of the entire analytic dialectic which tends to make the imaginary economy of fantasy, the various fantasmatic reorganizations, disorganizations, restructurations, and destructurations, the hub of all comprehensive progress as well

as therapeutic progress" as he would describe the then-current analytical situation to his students in the seminar's third year (Lacan 1993: 314).

Referring in Seminar *IV* to the schema that was constantly being elaborated throughout his early seminars, Lacan noted that the imaginary relation is itself "more or less fantasized": it is "inscribed between the two angles  $a-a$ ", i.e. imaginary ego and the alter ego(s) of the dual relation, and is "more or less marked by specularity and reciprocity between the ego and the other" (Lacan 1956–1957: 1/16/1957). This process of what Lacan calls 'alienation' which we have been describing, as being unavoidable for the human subject (along with the related analytic processes of narcissism, aggressivity and identification involved therein), may have become commonplace in theoretical literature, both Lacanian and non-Lacanian (particularly given the frequency with which the mirror stage is discussed) and represents an early manoeuvring on the total topic. Yet the question that we are interested in is: how does fantasy emerge within this process and what is its role in the subjective 'split' following alienation with the acquisition of law and language? Fantasy may be "only in a way the texture underlying the real world" yet it is able to morph and shift one's relation to it, if indeed one can arise at a suitable definition of said world (Lacan 1957–1958: 2/5/58). It is integral and cannot be sifted out by a better appraisal of the reality of a situation. Yet how early does this unsettling development come about?<sup>4</sup>

### **Ontogenesis: Childhood Fantasy**

What are the *first* signs of fantasy life, according to Lacan? If we aim at arriving at the point at which Lacan formalized the fantasy relation in the formula  $\$ \diamond a$  (between its introduction in Seminar *V* to its year-long treatment in Seminar *XIV*) it is necessary not only to account for the terms in isolation (one can find multitudinous studies on the split subject, the *objet petit a* and even explanations of the lozenge,  $\diamond$ , treated separately) but their combined power, so to speak. What exists in the formula beyond the sum of the total parts? What is the properly Lacanian addition to the concept of fantasy?

An initial explanation is offered in the fourth seminar (it is in the trio of seminars *IV*, *V* and *VI* in which the *birth* of fantasy can first be discovered) on the basis of Freud and Klein's work, particularly with respect to the triadic form

castration–frustration–privation (the three types of lack) which Lacan comes to develop.

To effectuate the constitution of the fantasy function, a certain relation to language, desire (plus need and demand) and satisfaction must be established in the child. In a realm, as we saw, where there is no "pre-established harmony" or even, relatedly, "a natural accord between object and subject", the "images and the fantasies that form the signifying material of the pregenital relation" arise out of "an experience made of the contact between signifier and signified", Lacan states (Lacan 1956–1957: 12/5/56). Put differently, the child, before being able to talk, must accumulate and integrate the range of impressions, semes and indications of a fragmentary state of being (the fragmented body itself being one of the first forms of fantasy located by Lacan in *Les complexes familiaux* [Lacan 1938] which remains situated as "the most fundamental, the most widespread, the most common" fantasy up to Seminar VIII [Lacan 1960–1961: 3/22/61]) organized around a series of fantasmatic, yet privileged, objects and the initial, usually familial, intermediaries.

The signifier is defined as taking its "material somewhere in the signified, in a certain number of vital relations, effectively exercised or lived" (Lacan 1956–1957: 12/5/56), attesting to an early attention to the complications of a language-based mediation with the world for every nascent speaking being (*parlêtre*). Pre-genital or pre-oedipal, Lacan will admit, with Klein, that there are processes occurring that begin much earlier than conceived in the orthodox psychoanalytic account of childhood development.<sup>5</sup> Fantasy is one such creation, with roots in the cry and the feeding situation.

Against Klein's conception of the child, Lacan notes that the mother is distinguished from the breast (total object against part object; this distinction is vital)<sup>6</sup> and is marked with the plus/minus of the presence/absence (Freud's *Fort! Da!*) schema: *all* frustration (which gains central importance as a concept in Seminar IV) is that pertaining to love; that which answers the child's first calls becomes a gift, the prototype of the field of speech, Lacan will later add: words arise from cries that in turn become "formed and articulated" (Lacan 1956–1957: 2/27/57). The "first love relation", the mother as present/absent "object of the call" can provide gifts, i.e. "signs of love", or alternatively present objects of need, e.g. the breast initially, in a relation of "balance and compensation" (Lacan 1956–1957: 2/6/57).

Schematically, this can be represented as:

- Mother → Absent → Call (need for nourishment followed by hallucination of satisfaction)
- Mother → Present → Object (satisfy need)

which evolves through symbolization into:

- Mother → Absent → Demand for Love (frustration followed by the seeking of alternative satisfactions)
- Mother → Present → Gift (sign of love)

### **Schema 1: Child/Caregiver/Object Dynamic<sup>7</sup>**

Frustration, however, is counterposed by Lacan to satisfaction; the satisfaction of a need comes to take the place of love (due to frustration) and the mother as lacking (inherently) is supplanted by the breast as providential. Thus, its role as a form of *symbolic* signification (patched over, as it were, an ordinary immediacy, or mother-child dualism, no matter how illusory this may be) is ushered in, which parallels the symbolic role that language will later play (Lacan 1956–1957: 2/6/57).<sup>8</sup> Henceforth, all satisfaction or the compensation thereof cannot but be symbolic, hence removed from any 'natural' relation (Lacan 1957–1958: 5/21/58).

The object can take on three forms he explains in Seminar VI: the pre-genital, the phallic (in its guise as 'general' form) and the delusional (Lacan 1958–1959: 5/20/59). The pre-genital body, and its fantasmatic signifying function, is equated with the animal as possessing two orifices (in/out); at the entry point the object is either cut off *from* the child or, in an oral-sadistic manner, cut off *by* the child (Lacan 1958–1959: 5/20/59). At the other end, the exit point, what the child cuts off is rejected within the "apprenticeship" of the "rites and the forms of cleanliness" (Lacan 1958–1959: 5/20/59), complications of which can often be seen in obsessional analysands.

The object which satisfies the child, Lacan notes, is more 'immediate', is not located in the 'beyond' (the beyond of love ultimately: which is further aimed at *being* as such, what one lacks), and it is in with regard to *jouissance* (and alternative

satisfaction generally) that a distinction emerges against that 'vital' experience of motherly love (Lacan 1956–1957: 1/16/57). Moreover, as previously stated, the object as substitutive provides one template for the model of language in lieu of the (imagined) original commensurability of man and world, child and caregiver (and signifier/signified in structural linguistic parlance). Bruce Fink, as always, addresses the problematic simply yet succinctly:

Why would a child ever bother to learn to speak if all of its needs were anticipated, if its caretakers fed it, changed it, adjusted the temperature, and so on before it even had a chance to feel hunger, wetness, cold, or any other discomfort? Or if the breast or bottle were always immediately placed in its mouth as soon as it began to cry? If nourishment is never missing, if the desired warmth is never lacking, why would the child take the trouble to speak? (Fink 1995: 103)

Substitutive satisfaction becomes the norm as pure considerations of survival become increasingly succeeded, and demands for love frustrated, attesting to the properly 'extra' dimension characteristic of the human as such implicit in the theory: even if every wish is satisfied, does one not always want more (or something else)? Freud's paradigmatic example of the fully satisfied child, asleep after feeding, becomes a somewhat mythical state of (temporary) fulfilment.

### **Language of Desire**

Thus within the evolution of a state Lacan will call *desire* we see the intimate coupling of the 'second' order (not in the sense of a metalanguage, but as overlain compensatory framework) of both the object and language as counterbalance: fantasy (which we now finally return to) originally emerges *within* this gap of the in-existent, natural relation attached to signification or concordance between word and thing, subject and object. To this end, every fantasy is seen as "articulated in terms of the subject speaking to the imaginary other" and as such "human desire is adjusted (*coapté*) not to an object, but to a phantasy" (Lacan 1958–1959: 11/12/58).

This has to be the case for Lacan as man "fundamentally does not know himself. And in the whole measure that he tries in this chain to approach, that he tries there to name himself, to locate himself, it is precisely there that he does not



find himself": instead, man is to be found "in the cuts (*coupures*)" and "every time he wants to grasp himself he is always only in an interval" (Lacan 1958–1959: 5/20/59), i.e. produced in the gap instituted by the 'bar' or barrier of signification. It is within this interval of the fading subject, vis-à-vis the world of objects, that the specific object of fantasy "shows us its form" (Lacan 1958–1959: 5/20/59).

This process occurs at the level of what *is* and *can be* symbolized (the non-symbolizable of course later possessing its own register, the real). As Lacan will note in Seminar *VIII*, "what is presented in human phantasy" is also the "the support of the signifying chain" (Lacan 1960–1961: 3/22/61). It is perhaps the most common characteristic of fantasy, despite its inexhaustible character, as support which recurs in the first eight seminars: support for the subject, the relation to the object, vicissitudes of desire and the realities external to the subject. These "fictions of desire" gradually become organized through the initial relations to object and caregiver(s) and later fixed within the trope of desire being the desire of the Other (Lacan 1997: 14). Desire is however also uncoupled from satisfaction, as we saw, and thus its offshoots ease the fantasmatic flows arising in relation to the external world:

If we give the term desire a functional definition, if for us it is the tension put into play by the cycle of behavioural fulfilment, whatever that may be, if we include it within a biological cycle, the desire achieves real satisfaction. If it achieves hallucinatory satisfaction, then there is another register here. Desire is satisfied in another fashion than in an effective satisfaction. It is the source, the fundamental means of introduction of a fantasy as such. Here there's another order, which doesn't achieve any objectivity, but which by itself defines the questions raised by the register of the imaginary. (Lacan 1988b: 213)

Implicit as such for the Freudian is also the sexual component of desire and fantasy (hence the usual, standard semantic coupling with sexual themes) which arises concomitantly with the symbolization of these early processes, e.g. of breastfeeding.<sup>9</sup> As Kim Lycos noted, referring to Freud's development of the fantasy space, particularly with regard to the *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality* from

1905, "simultaneous with the feeding function's achievement of satisfaction, a sexual process begins to appear", predominantly in the form of 'sensual sucking' (Lycos 1980: unpaginated). The initial self-preservation function becomes disinvested and the sexual drive, through a new process of auto-erotism, seeks a fantasmatic object for the first time.<sup>10</sup> Thus it is that a drive-related *libido* (a term which gradually falls out of use in Lacan's work) is intertwined with the image world (and an image of *the* world) at a microcosmic level *incommensurate with the macrocosmic*:

It is obvious that the libido, with its paradoxical, archaic, so-called pregenital characteristics, with its eternal polymorphism, with its world of images that are linked to the different sets of drives associated with the different stages from the oral to the anal and the genital – all of which no doubt constitutes the originality of Freud's contribution – that whole microcosm has absolutely nothing to do with the macrocosm; only in fantasy does it engender world. (Lacan 1997: 92)

One must always keep in mind, of course, the definition of sexuality that Freud provides in the early text which avoids a narrow, homogenous and ultimately functional view of human sexual life. Lacan states that as related to demand, fantasy "is not able to satisfy every need", however "we know only too well in the sexual order, that it is assuredly capable in every case of facing up to need, if it is a question of instinctual (*pulsionnel*) need" (Lacan 1957–1958: 2/5/58). Thus, the "very possibly illusory character of the sexual object" is foregrounded (Lacan 1957–1958: 2/5/58).

### **The Object as Fantasmatic**

Within this postnatal schema, the object relations theorists were able to provide, at the level of the child, cogent offerings on the early structuration of reality, Lacan would admit. Yet how specifically does the introduction of hallucination at the level of absence (see **Schema 1**) fundamentally shift the concordance of consciousness and externality with the introduction of objects? What D.W. Winnicott's account shows, for example, is that it is "not the frustration of *jouissance* that engenders reality", Lacan maintains (Lacan 1956–1957: 1/16/57).<sup>11</sup> In Seminar V Lacan, with reference

to his theory, discusses how objects are first able to be recognized in the gap between hallucination and what is offered:

...if fundamentally the hallucinatory satisfaction of need lies in the discord between this satisfaction and what the mother brings to the child, it is in this discord that there will open up the gap in which the child can constitute in some way a first recognition of the object, the object which is found despite appearances, one might say, to be disappointing. (Lacan 1957–1958: 2/5/58)

What is created in the child's first post-uterine experiences is an "original dimension" of the image (in this case, firstly of the breast, or, more specifically, the nipple) as fantasmatic, i.e. as a paradigmatic substituted/superimposed feature. This enables the creation of a new surging of desire but does not yet establish object constitution as such, as he makes clear in Seminar *IV* (Lacan 1956–1957: 1/16/57). Whether nipple or bottle, moreover, is not indifferent, Lacan adds, yet it "need not be specific" once symbolization has occurred; the mother, initially confronted with a sense of unreality is eventually seen as a "real being" and container of fantasmatic objects through the process (Lacan 1956–1957: 2/27/57).<sup>12</sup> The breast and other initial fantasmatic objects (faeces, phallus) then take on an foundational role which remains in place throughout life, at least in the unconscious. As Lacan would explain further in the *Écrits*:

For these objects, whether part-objects or not, but certainly signifying objects—the breast, excrement, and the phallus—are no doubt won or lost by the subject; he is destroyed by them or preserves them, but above all he *is* these objects, according to the place where they function in his fundamental fantasy. (Lacan 2006a: 513)

Within this *dialectic* (as it is still described at this early stage of the seminar), the childhood relation to the obscure object is established *as such*: a real object "takes on the value of a symbol", a "sign in the demand for love", detached from its function and intertwined with possession, first experienced or grasped through "oral capture" (Lacan 1956–1957: 2/27/57).<sup>13</sup> As Bruce Fink notes, fantasy is what enables the staging of a position "in which the child would like to see itself with respect to the

object that causes, elicits, and incites its desire" (Fink 1995: xiii) after the imaginary register (including "visual images, auditory, olfactory, and other sense perceptions of all kinds, and fantasy") is "restructured, rewritten, or 'overwritten' by the symbolic, by the words and phrases the parents use to express their view of their child" (Fink 1997: 88). It is with reference to perhaps *the* essential fantasy/fantasy structure for both Lacan and Freud, discussed in a number of the seminars, *Ein Kind wird geschlagen*, that we see the overdeterminations of the fantasmatic (here 'trans-') object (a theoretical precursor of the object *a*) presented in its clearest usage and paired intimately with the language function:

How does this fantasy present itself? It bears in itself the evidence, still very visible, of signifying elements of the speech articulated at the level of that trans-object, if one may put it so, which is the great Other, the place where unconscious speech is articulated, the S in so far as it is speech, history, memory, articulated structure. (Lacan 1956–1957: 1/16/57)

In the imaginary, 'original' dimension, then, a *fundamental image* of the body is formed and latched onto; the object, on the other hand, is termed "ambiguous" and as existing somewhere between reality and unreality (Lacan 1957–1958: 2/5/58).<sup>14</sup> After the original instance of experiencing oneself as lacking, mirroring the lack found in the mother, the child then enters a "second phase of imaginary specular identification with the image of the body, which is at the origin of his ego and which will provide its matrix" (Lacan 1956–1957: 2/6/57). Ironically, Lacan adds, "it is solely when we start with the ego" that it becomes possible of thinking "that somewhere day-dreaming without ego exists, that unconscious fantasies exist" as, paradoxically, "the notion of unconscious fantasy, of the activity of fantasy, is supported only by taking a detour via the ego" (Lacan 1988b: 214).

Thus it would appear that the establishment of the ego is both the precondition for fantasy and its interface, bringing us back to its role in the imaginary discussed in the introduction. The subject, in contrast, fades in the sway of the fantasmatic function. The emergence of *a* subject is represented then in the fantasmatic staging as a "moment of disappearance" (Lacan 1958–1959: 6/3/59), which seems to arise from the dissolution of the *Fort! Da!* problematic, the ludic interface, with the entry of desire into the symbolic network, and a complex relation

to these (quasi-Winnicottian) 'transitional' objects (i.e. not yet real or illusory but somewhere in-between) coupled with early forms of self-recognition:

From when can we consider that this game is promoted to its function in desire? From the moment that it becomes a phantasy, namely when the subject no longer comes into play, but anticipates himself in this game (*je*), where he short-circuits this game (*je*) where he is completely included in the phantasy. I mean, where he grasps himself in his disappearance. (Lacan 1958–1958: 6/3/59)

A short circuit thus creates a "support for desire" in the child, in the form of fantasy which is foundational of, and concurrently the glue of consistency for, human subjectivity (Lacan 1958–1959: 1/7/59). As previously discussed, Winnicott's theory allows one to see how a sense of reality emerges as such. Winnicott "shows with the greatest precision that the essential problem, is how the infant emerges from satisfaction, and not from frustration, to construct a world" (Lacan 1957–1958: 6/18/58). The importance of the frustration of the demand for love should not be overlooked; yet it is as desiring being and within the process of substitutive satisfaction that the child *creates* its early external relations, a process which fantasy facilitates.

### **Tying the Registers**

Throughout the early seminars, object relations analysis is seen as deficient yet certain theorists were able to create progress in terms of Freudian theory. The role of Klein, additionally, is not definitively defaced: she got many things right. What is necessary is acknowledging those – among which are the importance of early devouring fantasies,<sup>15</sup> the existence of a pre-oedipal realm and the retrospective/retroactive nature of some fantasies (Lacan 1956–1957: 12/12/56; Lacan 1956–1957: 1/16/57; Lacan 1958–1959: 6/17/59) – whilst making the theory more nuanced. Where Klein and other analysts oversimplify, where the theoretical edifice consumes the experiential data as it were, the specificity of each subject within the framework of the symbolic and the imaginary signifying structure of fantasy must be emphasized (Lacan's implicit critique "is that the notion of phantasy in Klein's work refers only to the imaginary axis" [Fink 2014: 40]).

Thus from the first, fantasy *as seen as imaginary* cannot be thought without the signifying, symbolic, interface within which it functions, itself a product of what has become (or what can become) symbolizable for the infant. What Lacan ultimately found wrong (again *clinically*) in post-Freudian theory were the proscribed roles of the analysand and analyst in the transference relation and the separation of the registers, as he argued in each of the initial seminars:

The current handling of the object relation in the context of an analytic relation conceived as dual is founded on a misrecognition of the autonomy of the symbolic order. This automatically introduces a confusion between the imaginary and real levels. But it doesn't eliminate the symbolic relation however, since we continue talking and, indeed, do nothing else. But it results from this misrecognition that what in the subject calls for recognition on the appropriate level of authentic symbolic exchange – which is not so easy to attain since it's always interfered with – is replaced by a recognition of the imaginary, of fantasy. (Lacan 1993: 14–15)

"The issue", argues Lacan, "is to know whether the symbolic exists as such, or whether the symbolic is simply the fantasy of the second degree of the imaginary coaptations. This is where there is a choice between two orientations of analysis" (Lacan 1954–1955: 306–307).

Although Lacan was only beginning to flesh out the real at this stage, we must recognize how essential the intertwining of all three registers is in all aspects of his theory, in the concept of fantasy especially (this is one element which may be said to hold across all of the seminars). Indeed, "all three dimensions" must be considered in Lacan's concept, as Fink points out with reference to Jacques-Alain Miller, tying together the above elements: "the imaginary is found in the image-like nature of the fantasy, including the image of the other's body (*a*); the symbolic is found in the fact that a fantasy often takes the form of a sentence constructed with subject, verb, and object; and the real is found in the axiomatic nature of fantasy" (Fink 2014: 41).

To further examine the development of the fantasy structure, which we have only achieved briefly and in regard to childhood and via the initial seminars specifically, one thus has to look at how the 'knotting' of the three levels continues

beyond early life and how the real as register, the object *a* as unattainable and *das Ding* as unreachable come to take on an expanded role. One can then also see how the different aspects of Lacan's subject come into existence through fantasy. We will, however, have to leave this for another time.

## Notes

1. The longest treatment being *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu* (Lacan 1938) wherein the Freudian and Kleinian influences are strongest (although Lacan already treats here many of the elements which will come to categorize the imaginary register).
2. In fact, as Fink argues, that the mother speaks to the child during the pregnancy phase may suggest the imposition of the symbolic dimension *in utero* (Fink 2014: 41).
3. As Russell Grigg et al. note (1989: 210): "In both neurosis and psychosis there is an attempt to replace a disagreeable reality by one more in keeping with the subject's wishes." However, the 'non-pathological' subject is also subject to fantasy processes which cover over both subjective and external incompleteness and make experienced reality more palatable.
4. The term *development*, although used frequently, does not predicate rigidity, fixedness or demarcated stages in Lacan's work: as Russell Grigg notes "Lacan opposes developmental approaches in psychoanalysis, maintaining that psychoanalytic theory does not describe the facts of actual development, but a structure which organises and manifests itself within an individual's history without being reducible to its developmental processes" (Grigg 2006: unpaginated).
5. Nonetheless, he did not consider her account of fantasy (although visionary) as being satisfactory: "the function of phantasy, even though perceived in a very pregnant fashion, was insufficiently articulated by her – it is the great shortcoming of the Kleinian articulation"; we thus learn in Seminar VIII, that "the theory of phantasy has never really been completed" (Lacan 1960–1961: 5/24/61).
6. In the first seminar he describes, in line with Klein, how the child distinguishes dangerous objects which are "externalised, isolated, from this primal universal container, from this primal large whole that is the fantasised image of the mother's body, the entire empire of the primal infantile reality" (Lacan 1988a: 82).
7. Schema based on the discussion in (Lacan 1956–1957: 3/6/57). This reflects the later formula "Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need" (Lacan 2006b: 689). It is also important to note that presence and absence begin to be imbricated with feelings of being loved or rejected (see Evans 2006: 121).
8. Crucial also is the notion of exchange which is also introduced: communication as exchange, exchange of the gift. For the broader context, see (Evans 2006: 203–204). The child will begin later to symbolically 'eat', i.e. incorporate, words:

To the extent that oral regression to the primitive object of devoration enters as a compensation in the frustration of love, the reaction of incorporation gives its model, its mold, its *Vorbild*, to that sort of incorporation which is the incorporation of certain words among others, which is at the origin of the early formation of what one calls the superego. (Lacan 1956–1957: 2/6/57)
9. The breast, again, is highlighted due to its paradigmatic role. It helps establish sexuality in ways similar for both boys and girls as "the girl like the boy, first of all desires the mother"; the process always involves "something that has the form of the breast through the intermediary of a certain number of other forms" (Lacan 1957–1958: 3/12/58).

10. Similarly fascinating is the argument the author develops, with background from Jean Laplanche, that erotogenic/biological zones are those that are first cared for by the mother, and in this regard become overly fantasmatic, i.e. sensually invested, from the start.

11. See also from Seminar *IV*: "we see the appearance of objects that Winnicott calls transition objects because we cannot tell on what side they belong in the reduced and incarnate dialectic of hallucination and the real object" (Lacan 1956–1957: 11/28/56). In Seminar *VII* he would expound the view (attributed to Freud) that jouissance can only be approached through fantasy: "the only moment of jouissance that man knows occurs at the site where fantasmata are produced, fantasmata that represent for us the same barrier as far as access to jouissance is concerned, the barrier where everything is forgotten" (Lacan 1997: 298).

12. Cf. also Seminar *IV*, where this notion of searching for the 'beyond' of being is established after the Oedipus complex is confronted:

But it is beyond what the real father authorizes as fixing the choice for one who has entered into the Oedipal dialectic, it is beyond this choice that there is what is always aimed at in love, which is, not the legal object, nor the object of satisfaction, but being – the object grasped in what it lacks. (Lacan 1956–1957: 3/6/57)

13. The account obviously draws on the distinction between reality and unreality described by Winnicott in *Playing and Reality* (Winnicott 1974), particularly in the article 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' and developed further in the notion of the intermediate zone outlined in 'The Place Where We Live'. However, Lacan inserts the space within the function of the imaginary: a fused development, but a development nonetheless. On the function of fantasy in providing equilibrium to reality, Lacan, in Seminar *V* (Lacan 1957–1958: 2/5/58), also refers his students to Winnicott's article 'Primitive Emotional Development' (Winnicott 1945).

14. In Seminar *V*, the partial object is distinguished from what Abraham called partial love (Lacan 1957–1958: 12/11/57).

15. Already apparent in their influence on Lacan in 1938 in *Les complexes familiaux* where he describes "phantasies of the dismemberment and dislocation of the body, of which the phantasies of castration are only an image highlighted by a particular complex" (Lacan 1938: 30–31).

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