

The work of Jacques Lacan — eminent French psychoanalyst and influential thinker (1901-1981) — is recognized as being of vital importance to psychoanalysts, philosophers, and all those concerned with the study of man and language. Its value is not limited to the field of psychoanalysis alone, but provides the basis for a new philosophy of man and a new theory of discourse. It is, however, notoriously difficult for the non-specialist reader to come to terms with Lacan's reading of Freud and his investigations of the unconscious. Until now, there has been no satisfactory general introduction to Lacan, and this first general exposition of his work — translated and revised from the French edition — is designed to provide the conceptual tools which will enable the reader to study Lacan using the original texts.

Anika Lemaire gives a clear introduction to Lacan's work by showing its roots in linguistics and structural anthropology and by examining the meaning of the 'return to Freud' proclaimed by Lacan. Particular attention is given to Lacan's use of linguistics, the science which provides access to formations of the unconscious, such as dreams and symptoms. Anika Lemaire also points out the close connexion between Lacan's analysis of the Oedipus Complex and the general theory of culture and the symbolic order elaborated by Lévi-Strauss.

The book includes a Preface by Jacques Lacan.

'One of the best academic introductions to Lacan's discourse.'  
— Eugen Baer, *Structuralist Review*

'Not the charlatan he is sometimes designated, but someone to be reckoned with . . . I would reverse the usual prescription and suggest starting with the exposition and criticism first, and only then proceeding to Lacan's own text . . . start with Anika Lemaire.'  
— Anthony Storr, *Sunday Times*

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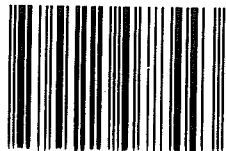
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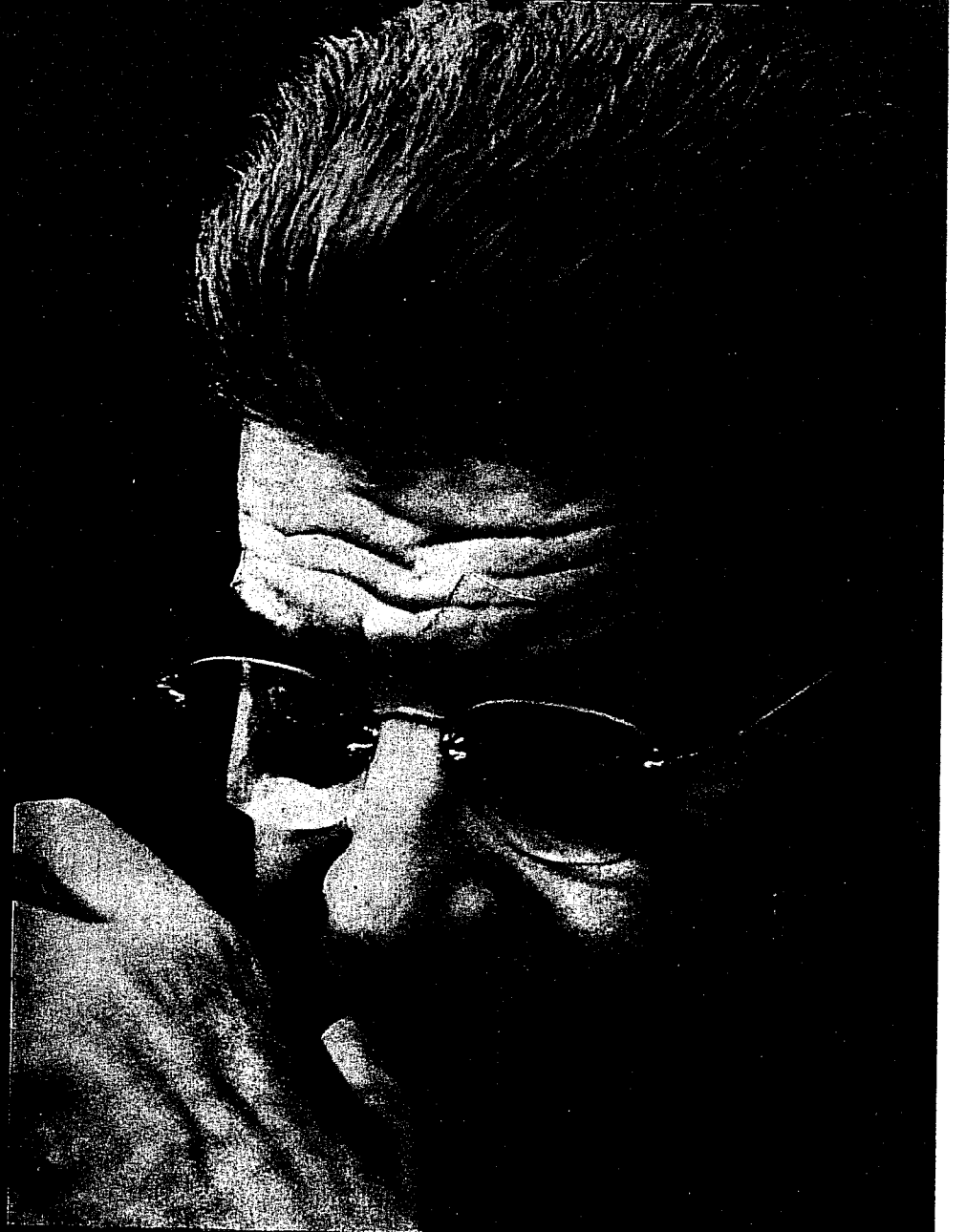
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JACQUES LACAN

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ROUTLEDGE

## THIRTEEN

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### From need (or lived lack) to the instinct and desire: accession to language

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The three-point dialectic we are about to discuss is, at bottom, identical to the movement whereby the subject constitutes himself in discourse by splitting into two parts: subject of the utterance and unconscious subject; and whereby he subsequently alienates himself in language by constructing his ego.

In moving from lack to desire, the subject in effect accedes to language, and in moving from desire to demand he alienates himself in language, creates himself and fashions himself at will. This section, then, repeats in different terms the Lacanian themes of Spaltung and Splitting expounded in Part Three.

Lacan seems to have provided two different perspectives on these themes and I hope to plot them both. The first perspective is more general, whereas the second, which we will be dealing with here, is more closely concerned with man's subjective life.

Like Freud, Lacan makes a distinction between need, a purely organic energy, instinct and desire, the active principle of the psychical processes.

Before going on to expound Lacan's conception, it might be useful to include Freud's own views.

Between need and desire, Freud introduces the term instinct.

The instinct differs from the simple organic need in that it introduces an erotic quality and is thus from the outset inscribed in the domain specific to psychoanalysis.

The instinct is a constant force of a biological, organic (and not psychical) nature which tends towards the suppression of any state of tension.

It belongs to the psychical apparatus, be it conscious or unconscious, only through the intermediary of an ideational representative (*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*).

Desire is the directing force of the psychical apparatus, which is orientated in accordance with its perception of the pleasant or the unpleasant. It alone can set the psychical apparatus in motion. It transpires

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from the distinctions made by Freud that desire comes into force as the tension of the psychical apparatus only in so far as a representative of the instinct appears. It then moves the psychical apparatus in function of that representative.

For Lacan, whose point of view was dealt with in Part Four, the instinct takes as its support organic need and metabolic function, and introduces an erotic quality.

Being canalized by the erotogenic zones, instinct is always partial if one compares it to the young child's vital and radical lack at birth.

The eroticized partial instinct refers back to the organic need which founds it, but it also refers back beyond this to a lived experience of radical lack resulting from separation from the maternal body.

For Lacan, lack is the void, the zero, that which lies before the instinct. It refers to the absence of an anatomical complement and induces organic need.

Lacan often uses the term lack (*manque*) or gap (*béance*) in his *Écrits*, and he always does so in a context which indicates what it is that lies before any form of instinctual expression or canalized desire.

Thus, lack is that which precedes the instinct 'expressed' by the erotogenic zone and the letter. It also precedes the desire expressed in a signifier. Lack implies the idea of the lived drama of an irreversible incompleteness rather than that of some erotic appeal. In a sense, it subsumes all the radical anxiety in man; the anxiety which results from his human condition.

To adopt the new terminology recently introduced by Leclaire in his book, *Psychanalyse* . . . (55), the instinct is the appeal for a return to the pleasure principle made by the crack inscribed in the body (the erotogenic zone) during some primal experience of pleasure or unpleasure. The instinct is the reactivation of an old commotion, the effect of external stimulation.

As for the concept of desire, it is difficult to see how it can be presented on the basis of Lacan's texts. We will therefore turn to 'La réalité du désir' (42), an article by Lacan's follower Leclaire.

Leclaire calls desire 'the force of cohesion which holds the elements of pure singularity together in a coherent set'.

By 'elements of pure singularity', he is designating the elementary signifying elements of the unconscious: the letter which marks the limits of the erotogenic zone.

Thus, Philippe's unconscious desire is to establish a link with Lili, to fill in the crack of castration, of separation from his mother. In the psyche, desire is the successor to the essential lack lived by the child separated from its mother, the successor to the organic need and the instinct, for desire is what instinct becomes when it is alienated in a signifier.

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The above-mentioned desire will, in the case of young Philippe, be alienated in the desire to drink which is substituted for the instinct directed towards Lili.

We now understand more clearly why Lacan assimilates the transition from lack to desire to the subject's advent to language. In the movement whereby the child in one form or another translates his need he alienates it in the signifier and betrays its primary truth. The real object of lack, of need and of the instinct is lost for ever, cast into the unconscious. The subject is divided into two parts: his unconscious truth and the conscious language which partially reflects that truth. This is also the reason for man's radical inability to find anything to satisfy him.

Let us follow in detail Leclaire's reasoning in (42).

The elements of pure singularity are, he tells us, characterized by a total absence of logical connexions. As an example, the author suggests five elementary signifiers of the unconscious:

- the smell of a woman's neck on the way back from a walk;
- the acidulated edge of something sweet;
- the modulation of a voice;
- a beauty spot or mole;
- the fullness of the hand as the ball is caught.

One can imagine, says the author, what might characterize the unconscious desire of such a subject: to find once more the site of the beauty spot (noticed on the mother's neck as the child came back from a walk). The gradual imaginary alienation of the unconscious desire will be occasioned by the absence of logical or significant links between these pointillist impressions, which will contract various associative links with one another. On this basis, one could imagine the subject becoming obsessional, spending hours looking for the place for the bolt he found in the bottom of his car. A further displacement could, for example, be an obsession with exact references in texts. Subjected to free association around these symptoms, such a patient might come up with the signifying succession: bolt (*boulon*) - spot (*bouton*) - neck (*cou*) - beauty spot (*grain de beauté*). Thus, the formations of the unconscious (in this case the symptom) reveal the truth of the unconscious discourse alienated in the signifier.

We know how these elementary signifiers are inscribed in the unconscious. They arise in the very instant of lived pleasure, fix and delimit the erotogenic zone and the sexual agitation in the unconscious.

The elementary signifiers of the unconscious are witnesses to the subject's accession to language. But as no logical connexion holds them together, it is impossible for the subject to formulate the desire they enclose, except in a more elaborate linguistic form, such as the phantasy

This, as I see it, is what Lacan means when he says repeatedly in his *Écrits* that: desire always lies both beyond and before demand. To say

that desire is beyond demand means that it transcends it, that it is eternal because it is impossible to satisfy it. By articulating desire with its own conditions as a linguistic form, demand necessarily betrays its true import.

But desire is also dug out of the area below demand. In this case, a reversal of roles seems to take place. Miming the frenzy of desire, the unconditional absolute demand recalls the radical lack of being which underlies desire.

Desire is then invaded, as it were, or overtaken by the demand from which, moreover, it will be reborn, as no demand is capable of fully satisfying it.

Desire is produced in an area beyond demand, in that, in articulating the life of the subject according to its conditions, demand cuts off the need from that life. But desire is also dug out of the area below demand, in that, as an unconditional demand of presence and absence, demand evokes lack of being under the three figures of the nothing that constitutes the basis of the demand for love, of the hate that even denies the other's being, and of the unspeakable element in that which is ignored in its request. (*Écrits*, 28)

All the objects of the subject's desire will always be a reminder of some primal experience of pleasure, of a scene which was lived passively and will always refer back through associative links, which become more complex and more subtle with the passage of time, to that lived experience.

Connected with any phantasy-scenario there is a choice imposed by the ineffability of certain marks inscribed in the unconscious signifiers of desire. An object is required to unite these scattered points. Hence the metonymic course of desire, forever insatiable since it refers back to the ineffable, to the unconscious desire and the absolute lack it conceals. Sexual desire is a sort of held note in the crescendo of the alienation of desire. We have in fact seen that the father's speech forbidding the child its mother in the Oedipus put the child in a position to divert its desire on to something else by accepting the law.

Freud reveals to us that it is thanks to the Name-of-the-Father that man does not remain in the sexual service of the mother, that aggression towards the father is at the principle of the Law, and that the Law is at the service of desire, which it institutes through the prohibition of incest.

It is, therefore, the assumption of castration which creates the lack through which desire is instituted. Desire is the desire for desire, the desire of the Other and it is subject to the Law.

It is the default of the phallus which mounts up the symbolic debt. Desire reproduces the subject's relation to the lost object.

(*Écrits*, 31)

As Laplanche and Pontalis have said (46), phantasies are a form of the activity of thought separated off by a sort of cleavage (by access to conscious language). They are of the order of the symbol and in their themes they pretend, like myths, to provide a solution to the subject's basic problems.

What is more, through the mediation of a scenario, they account for the subject's insertion into the symbolic.

Phantasies are one of the modes of the hallucinatory satisfaction of desire.

The most basic are those which tend to recover those objects connected with the first experience of the rise and resolution of desire. They pin down the moment of separation of the lived experience and the hallucinatory reliving of it, the moment of the separation of the gratifying object from the sign which inscribes both the object and the absence of the object.

We should note that in alluding to phantasies and to the metonymy of desire, we are already speaking of the 'defile of the signifier', or what Lacan calls: demand. In Lacan, demand appears to be a generic term designating the symbolic, significant site in which the primordial desire is gradually alienated.

The elementary signifiers of the unconscious in fact contract multiple associative connexions with one another and with those signifiers which join them as a result of successive repressions. They organize the phantasies, become condensed in metaphors and associate metonymically, so that when they rise into consciousness, where they determine the avatars of our human quest, they are indecipherable. We can see that the definition of demand that we can draw from *Écrits* may be assimilated to the notion of splitting:

The fading of the subject (splitting) comes about in the suspension of desire, because the subject is eclipsed in the signifier of demand and in the fixation of the phantasy. (*Écrits*, 29)

To sum up: the primal division of the subject (Spaltung) into conscious discourse and unconscious discourse is, for Lacan, identical to the transition from lack to desire. Both these movements are precociously realized in the subjection of the subject to imaginary representations. They are definitively established during the Oedipus in accordance with the schema of the paternal metaphor.

The future 'subject' wishes to be the phallus for his mother, to be, that is, everything to her. The father intervenes as the author of the Law, the representative of the symbolic order, and forbids the dual union of child and mother. The instinct is repressed into the position of something misrecognized and is replaced by a symbol.

The subject then enlists in the order of symbolism and of language, and his primitive instinct (to be everything to his mother) becomes a

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desire to know, to have, to possess. Through endless sublimations, through multiple displacements from one signifier to another, the primal unconscious desire becomes alienated in demand: this is Splitting.

In the quest for the phallus the subject moves from being it to having it. It is here that is inscribed that last Spaltung by which the subject articulates himself to the Logos. (*Écrits*, 28)

The phallus symbolizes privation or lack of being, and the latter derivatively settles in the lack of having engendered by any frustration of the particular or global demand.

(J. Lacan: *Pour un Congrès sur la sexualité féminine*)

The summary we have just made is a theoretical and general look at a process whose articulating links are not in fact of a macroscopic but of a microscopic order.

In short, we should establish a connexion between the microscopy of Leclaire's theories and the macroscopy of those of Lacan.

How in fact are we to find the meeting place between, on the one hand, Leclaire with his detailed description of the transition from instinct to desire through the intervention into the unconscious of a letter which will determine the desire's object choice, and, on the other hand, Lacan with his panoramic view of the transition through the Oedipus from lack of being the phallus to having the phallus?

We could make a personal attempt to establish this 'new' bridge by interpolating on the basis of Stein's contribution, which was discussed above. If we assume – and it seems more and more necessary to do so – the fact that accession to language is not, strictly speaking, effected at the time of the Oedipus (limited to the age of three or four years), or, again, if we consider the Oedipus in a broader perspective, as a global and gradual phenomenon integrating the origins of the formation of the subject through accession to language, we can then begin to see the connexion between Leclaire and Lacan. On the basis of a few experiences of pleasure lived by the child in direct and permanent contact with its mother, a desire is born and is subtended in the innermost part of the unconscious by one or more signifiers. The unconscious position of these signifiers, the sole witnesses to the lived experience, will direct the desire towards certain objects connected by some law of association with the primitive object of pleasure whose letter will appear as the negation inscribed and dug out in the unconscious. The particular and personal object of the subject's desire will be determined step by step in this way.

The period assigned to the Oedipus will reactivate the desire to receive erotic pleasure from the mother and in this period the desire will take on a more specific character related to the sexual maturation of the child.

One could say that at this stage the child wishes to be everything to its mother, to be the phallus, the symbol of the complement of its own lack. The child wants to possess its mother completely and without sharing anything.

We now come back to Lacan's own articulation.

Having said that, I think it judicious at this point in our study to include some remarks on the notion of the death instinct in the Lacanians.

The Lacanians have given an original signification to the death instinct, a signification directly connected with the organic incoherence they consider specific to the child before its entry into language. Following Leclaire in his well-known article, 'The unconscious: a psycho-analytic study' (48):

The death instinct is the specific energy which allows the counter-cathexis necessary to the primal repression that creates the unconscious. In that sense, it is also the matrix of desire, as the latter arises together with language.

It is an 'active void', whose only connexion with the libidinal instincts is that it founds them.

Language – which also makes desire possible on the basis of lack – is linked with the surfacing of the death instinct.

The death instinct is that radical force which surfaces in the catastrophic or ecstatic instant when the organic coherence of the body appears as though unnamed and unnameable, a swoon or ecstasy, screaming out its appeal for a word to veil and sustain it. It constitutes the basis of the castration complex and allows the development of language, together with the possibility of desire and the development of the sexual instincts. (48, p. 144)

One could say that the original text of the unconscious fixes the death instinct by founding desire and the libidinal instincts. The primordial signifiers do in fact conceal the surfacing of the void of the death instinct, establish desire and give the subject his organic and psychical coherence.

If we now turn to Leclaire's book, *Psychanalyse* . . . (55), we see that the death instinct is the ecstatic void met with by the subject in pleasure or in pain, and from which the subject is preserved only by the letter (not merely a linguistic term but a mnemonic trace whose form may vary), which appears in order to support his organic and psychical coherence. The death instinct is the attractive 'zero' around which the subject gravitates, the antimony of the 'one', which is also the subject when he has been able to maintain himself in consciousness with the help of some letter.

It seems therefore that the death instinct intervenes in the constitution of the 'subject' in two phases: that which inscribes 'the letter' in the unconscious, an olfactory, visual, audible or other element, and fills in

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the primitive void; and that which leads the subject to language in the true sense by way of the metaphoric function whereby *the letter is*, one might say, *replaced by an alienating symbol*.

This definition of Leclaire's seems to conform to that found in the following text from Lacan; it must be realized that this text is inscribed in the context of the death instinct.

The game in which the child plays at making an object disappear from his sight in order to bring it back once more, and at the same time modulates the alternation of distinctive syllables, manifests the determinacy man receives from the symbolic order.

Man devotes his time to deploying the structural alternative in which presence and absence take their call from one another.

It is in the moment of their conjuncture, the zero point of desire, that the object comes under the seizure which, annulling its natural properties, subjects it to the conditions of the symbol. This game provides an illuminating insight into the individual's entry into language, which superimposes the determination of the signifier on that of the signified.

(*Écrits: Le Séminaire sur la lettre volée*, pp. 46-7)

The moment in which desire becomes human is also that in which the child is born into language.

The subject is not simply mastering his privation by assuming it, but . . . is raising his desire to a second power, for his action destroys the subject that it causes to appear and disappear in the anticipating provocation of its absence and presence. His action thus negates the field of force of desire in order to become its own object to itself . . . the desire of the child has become the desire of another, of an *alter ego* . . . whose object of desire is henceforth his own affliction. *ubryem, 7ohama*

So when we wish to attain in the subject what was before the serial articulations of speech, and what is primordial to the birth of symbols, we find it in death. (*Écrits*, 16)

## FOURTEEN

### From desire to demand

The repressed instinct does not stop straining after complete satisfaction, which would consist of the repetition of a primal satisfaction: union with the mother.

Nothing can put an end to this state of tension.

It is the difference between the satisfaction obtained and the satisfaction sought which maintains this motive force.

Pleasure is linked to the satisfaction given by an object whose only value is its imperceptible difference from a lost model.

(S. Leclaire, 52)

One could say that it is the incidence of the signifier as an autonomous chain which diverts man's desire into demand through displacements and condensations of cathexis on to certain signifiers or, to be more precise, through metaphor and metonymy.

In the section which follows we will see the justification for Lacan's assimilation of linguistic metonymy to Freudian displacement and metaphor to condensation.

Thus, demand will always be supported by the unconscious desire and will not in fact be really concerned with the satisfactions it appears to call for. This is why demand, again according to Lacan, is intransitive and eternal and is not concerned with any specific object in a stable manner, no object being capable of replacing the lost object.

In cases where the object of demand is knowing (*connaissance*) or knowledge (*savoir*), the subject will always have to transgress the known in search of the unknown and will do so in memory of that omnipotence of his desire which man has given up for lost. In the words of P. Aulanier-Spairani (74): 'Whatever the object of the subject's interrogation: birth . . . the order of the world . . . the real object of the search is knowledge of the desire of the Other (the mother).'

We are now perhaps in a better position to understand Lacan's words (35): 'There is always a beyond to demand. In analysis desire presents itself as an irreducible residue, the result of the gap between the exigencies of need and the demand articulated.'

The Lacanian analytic cure then seeks to unfold in reverse order the sequence of signifiers in which the subject's desire has gradually been alienated. It interrogates the patient's signifiers, taking them literally and in the order of their appearance, an order which is always regressive: