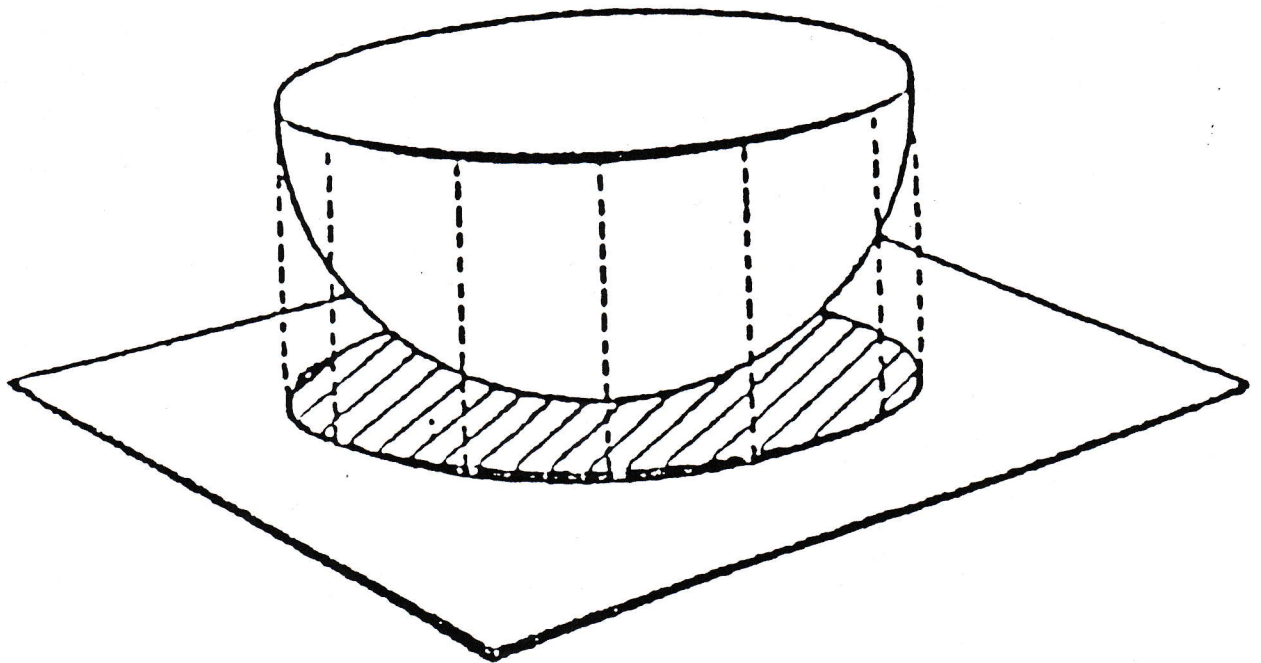


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Freud, Lacan, and Anthropology

by

Anne Dunand

The title for this paper may seem to imply a search for connections between Psychoanalysis and Anthropology on a theoretical level and with very few approaches towards a clinical point of view. Yet it is not so.

With a study of Freud and Lacan's relations to Anthropology we are really close to what is involved in a daily struggle with the problems that are raised by neurosis and psychosis. What indeed is the weight of cultural beliefs in the shaping of neurotic symptoms, psychotic delusions and perverse acts?

Each of us, in his study or practice, cannot have failed to recognise familiar creeds in the contents of delusions, in the search of patients for a more adequate type of enjoyment, for something that would be satisfactory and allowed, pleasurable and ideal at the same time. A symptom always points to what we call the field or the area of the Other, it bears the stamp of the subject's particular misunderstanding of what he believes was expected from him, the peculiar vocation that was given to his coming into the world and that has been put for him into so many words. Even in the distorted and abortive identifications of psychosis, we find an unmistakable representation of the Other, with its social significance, for instance the would-be-identifications to Christ or to some public figure or legislator, the Son or the Father in his paradigmatic and exacting excellence.

Both Lacan and Freud could not fail to recognise in their patients the demands of culture and civilisation, through the distortions given to sexual satisfactions, in the strangeness of acting out and the dangers of certain compulsions.

Anthropology, on the other hand, has always tried to maintain that it dealt essentially with normal forms of behaviour and with the normal psyche. Even in the weirdest situations, where the carrying out of magic and ritual, and the staging of initiation or of possession rites would amount, in our civilisation, to crossing the line from normal to abnormal, or would be accounted for in terms of marginalisation, the anthropological scientific ideal of pure observation and the requisite of abstention from moral judgement prevail. To some extent, it may be stated that, for an anthropologist, whatever is social is normal. Conversely, to a psychoanalyst, we may state that whatever is human is not normal; indeed, if we follow Lacan in this kind of distribution only normality is an ideal not to be sought for, but the psychotic only achieves the ideal of normality.

Now, if I draw this distinction it is not to underline what sticks out as far-fetched in psychoanalysis's and anthropology's two different attitudes as far as normal and abnormal is concerned. But it is to point out why, though anthropology and psychoanalysis have always laid claims to unravelling what is universal in the human mind, what reaches widely over the border of geographical or nosographical differences, they have not come to an agreement and the two fields of research do not meet. They do not even agree on what to disagree about. Yet they have some affinities that make it worth while studying their very points of divergence.

In no uncertain terms anthropology has always laid claims to being a wider branch of psychology, indeed, as Levi-Strauss, one of the major theoreticians on the subject, states it: anthropology is a psychology.

As for the psychoanalysts, they have always asked anthropology to verify, to bring proof, as it were, to the universality of their findings. Because both branches of knowledge believe they have discovered the essential structures of the social tie, and the fundamental mechanisms of human relationships, they cannot ignore each other.

Now, how, one may ask, did this quarrel start, who brought about this state of affairs? It may be a question of opinion, but I think it started with Freud, and particularly with Totem and Taboo, his first book dealing with the anthropological assumptions and accounts, and where he attempted to weave the anthropological material and the psychoanalytical thread into one pattern.

But of course, long before that, on the anthropological side, there have been attempts to explain behaviours that seemed very strange and foreign in terms of psychology; because anthropology is a much older branch of research. I will not comment here upon this precursory work, because the point I want to stress here is the convergence of anthropology and psychoanalysis on one particular feature that both have been led to recognise as a new juncture in their investigations: namely the predominance of the symbolic.

The origin of this idea can be traced back to the roots of philosophy; it finds confirmation in psychoanalysis before it makes headway in anthropology. Though we find many landmarks pointing the way in that direction either before or after Freud. Malinowsky has left us some interesting reflections on language, in his personal journal, written during the first world war (1917)(1); he writes down rather casually, as a subject to be further investigated, that language must be equated to a system of social ideas and is a collective creation. But to him this is of the same nature as a law, in the sense the word has in sciences such

as physics and chemistry. He equates language plus individual ideas to what he terms social imagination; we can see there, in a still tangled and hazy formulation, the tentative to distinguish language per se, the symbolic, from individual and collective images.

In the psychoanalytical field, Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, as a method of analysis, gives the preference to the symbolical mechanisms of condensation and displacement over the imaginary contents of the dream-thoughts, and reads the dream like a rebus, giving more importance to the wording than to its imaginary apparent significations, that convey a narrative consistency. But of course, in Freud's first discoveries on hysteria, we can already find this predominance of the symbolic over the imaginary, the hysteric patient having a particularly transparent rapport to the symbolic, staging the words her history was made of: you will remember for instance, the case of Fraulein Emy von R. whose abasia was, as Freud states it, to be traced back to a paralysis of symbolisation. (2).

Now, beside this common predicate that gradually comes to the forefront in anthropology and in psychoanalysis, that human actions and their apparent meaning are determined by symbolic laws, there is another ground for a common basis, a law that was first discovered under the manner of an overall, common phenomenon: the prohibition of incest.

Freud, in Totem and Taboo, standing on firm anthropological ground and on his own clinical findings, states that this interdiction is at the root of neurosis or of cultural achievement, for it can lead to either the one, or the other, or a combination of both. Cultural achievement, or sublimation as he terms it, has a way of eschewing the inhibitions that provoke neurosis and that are caused by the necessity of substituting an object for another, whilst the instinctual drive, or Trieb, remains the same in its aim.

Now we must examine how this prohibition of incest has been searched and probed very closely by Freud, Lacan, and anthropology.

Freud tried to find an explanation for this law, in a historical background. The sons of the horde wanted women, whom the father monopolised, and therefore he was put to death. But after his death, the sons found themselves bound by reciprocal ties and by the love of the deceased father. This theory has been subjected to many attacks, on the basis that it could not be proven, but especially on the basis that it supposed as an end product, an effect, something that had to be there beforehand. Namely a tie between the sons of the horde, some kind of social tie. It retains some validity nowadays if it is read as a kind of modern myth, to

explain how something real happened that made unlimited enjoyment impossible, for the sons could no more enjoy all the women or the mother, after the crime, than they could before. On the other hand, it involves the fact that something real, a crime, unspeakable and forgotten, that is, of the same nature as the repressed, is aimed at when satisfaction is desired and is missed. Like any anthropological myth, this psychoanalytical myth tries to put in an epical, symbolic form, the real that can never be remembered for it has no name, it is not namable. All myths about the origin of social ties and traditions have this quality of asking for belief where explanation fails.

But anthropology tried also to find a plausible reason for the prohibition of incest. One of the latest major attempts to give this law some reasonable basis was made by Levi-Strauss in his Elementary structures of kinship(1947). His idea is that all structures of kinship, elementary or complex, are based on this interdiction. And here we see a parallel with psychoanalysis: the theory of neuroses and psychoses is also built on this primeval law.

Levi-Strauss, however, transforms the negative interdiction into a positive obligation; as he reformulates it in terms of structure, the basic rule in all societies, is that one man must exchange a woman with another man, according to rules that are peculiar to each type of culture, i.e. the circle of exchange can be very wide, involving a crosspuzzle of relationships or shorter, more direct; and he has drawn the patterns of these relationships in a mathematical pattern of rules that can allow us to establish the probabilities of all possible matrimonial ties, existing or not. He equates this pattern of ties with the syntax of a language, women being the exchangeable terms, and as such equated to words. The whole system has a meaning, a meaning in the moral sense, the group has to survive, and to do so has to comply with the law of reciprocity, of give and take. This, of course, implies that the group complies unknowingly with the moral obligation of reciprocity and Levi-Strauss states that this is his conception of the unconscious. Who does not comply with the structure of the group is sick because there is a necessary homogeneity between the structure of the group and the individual structure.

Now all this is very interesting and has received wide acclaim, it being particularly satisfying to the mind and opening wide alleys to the anthropologists' taste for orderly classification. It also does away with such unseemly phenomena as desire, the subject, and the Oedipus complex, it reduces the desire for the mother to a mere nostalgia for disorder and confusion, such as is likely to be found in festivities and carnivals, and other forms of

limited social misbehaviour, and of course the father is neither murdered nor mourned. The psychoanalytical scheme of development elaborated in the Elementary Structures refers to Freud and to many authors of the Kleinian school, but it is of great interest to us because it gives an account of the formation of the super-ego somewhat akin to the Kleinian, archaic, pre-oedipal super-ego, a super-ego born out of the reaction to an excess of enjoyment and structured according to the norms of the group. What brings this otherwise strange and rather erratic conception of the super-ego close to the Lacanian conception is that it does away with the familiar figures of father and mother and constructs the Other out of a structure that is drawn out as analogical with language, having its own syntax and its own autonomous rules. But what distinguishes it from the Lacanian Other is its imaginary coating; first the impact of the law as such is lost, since it is transformed from the negative interdiction to the positive obligation, and second, it is given a moral sense, it is given a moral tinge, when the essence of a law is really that it is quite alien to good reasons. Essentially we have a law because there is no reason. In psychoanalytical wording, from the symbolic Other, it turns out to be the "Thou shalt" of the ego-ideal, and a commandment to enjoy, coming from the obscene ferocious super-ego. The line between the subject and the Other is severed and deviates into the imaginary track.

But we will discuss this further when coming to Lacan's work with anthropology.

If we go back to Totem and Taboo, there is also another point that Freud stressed as essential towards explaining how social ties are constructed; the social tie stems from the child's sexuality, his desire for his mother and his father, what he wants to be and what he wants to have, all this is linked with family ties. This seems again impossible to Levi-Strauss since his explanation for the social tie having its foundation in childhood is quite different. Rivalry is termed as springing quite naturally between equals in a mirror relationship, and not referred to the unique and unforgettable Other as Freud named it. The object is not lost and this does not start the lifelong quest to find it again. The other man has it and all one has to do is to exchange what one has got and cannot keep against something that will be obtained according to the rules. Therefore nothing will be missed.

But the main grievance against Freud's Totem and Taboo was really of another type. His description of how cultures make do with totems and taboos are founded on his clinical findings, phobias in childhood and rituals in the obsessive neuroses; myths are compared to delusions; and above all,

the man of "primitive" cultures is equated to the child and the neurotic.

Primitive man is said to act rather than to think, because thought is inhibited action in Freud's reconstruction of early ages. Now what makes Freud's book so enticing is clearly that his equating the primitive, the child and the adult neurotic can be understood as leaving no civilisation out of this comparison and that what he describes are if the fundamental articulations of the different mechanisms of ideation. However it met with reprobation from the anthropological researchers on the basis, as I have stated above, that normal man functions differently.

What was kept, unfortunately, enough, of the Freudian constructions, in the social sciences, was mostly his theory of stages in development. The oral, the anal, the phallic and the genital, have received general recognisance, as obligatory steps towards normal development. I will not go into further detail of Freud's anthropological theories now, although one has to bear in mind Group psychology and the analysis of the Ego, and Moses and Monotheism, where the subject of the social tie is further examined in relation to identification and the role of the father.

The problem with anthropology, at this stage, is how development can be explained in terms of structure. Is it the same structure that is there, presiding over the subject's life even before it actually starts with birth, as the language of the Other, or does it change? Are the gradual and variegated relations to the Other, as they wind and unwind through life, changes in the subject's relation to the Other? I find it difficult to admit, on the one hand, as Levi-Straus puts it, that the relation is the structure, and on the other hand that whatever structure does not suit the cultural or group structure, in other terms whatever is particular to the subject just is lost, has to be shed. This could be understood as another way of looking at repression but he denies that what is repressed constitutes the unconscious.

Having gone so far, Levi-Straus sort of stopped in his theorising the relation of the subject to language, or elementary structures, and for very good reasons. He was interested in the patterns of group and their relations to each other, in the particularities of culture and myths more than in the particular way that a subject relates to them.

It was for Lacan to pick up the thread from where he let it drop. Before coming to the question of Lacan and structure, I would like to give a brief outline of Lacan's encounters with anthropology. I will not burden you with citations; Lacan's references to anthropology are to be counted in a number of hundreds; in the *Ecrits*, the *Seminars*, *Scilicet*;

but also in discussions, either at philosophical reunions or psychological sessions, those of which we have the minutes. His questioning of anthropology was as bad as Freud's; he just could not let it alone. Even in his later work, where disappointment takes the place of long-standing enthusiasm, he still finds a way of commenting on it.

As early as in the 'thirties, with his studies on schizophrenic writings, schizography, with his thesis on the case of Aimee, and his commentary on the sisters Papin, one is struck by the way in which he links the abnormal, the criminal, with the demand of the Other.

If Freud questioned anthropology through infantile sexuality and neurosis, Lacan approached it through his studies on paranoia. Freud had asked anthropology to give a proof that infantile sexuality and the primitive man's behaviour and beliefs had the same contents, and further that obsessional neurosis could be found repeatedly as a first step to the formation of social groups.

Lacan's views on paranoia as a distortion or a compromise

savage was man before the unforgivable sin of wanting to eat from the tree of knowledge.

Now Lacan, in The Problem of Style and the psychiatric conception of the paranoid forms of experience(3), speaks of revolution brought by psychiatric research in the field of anthropology. In a later work, his contribution on the family in the Encyclopaedia (4) he states that there is no other human reality but its cultural environment. Man therefore is governed by culture, there is no such thing as human "nature", for whatever is biological is crossed by the cultural. He gives the example of nurturing as culturally achieved and of mental anorexia as one of its shortcomings. Human reality is not measurable in the same terms that nature is, for it is always determined by ethical laws(5) and the structural laws of the noumenal order, meaning the apprehension of all sensible perceptions by intellection. In these early essays, Lacan says how welcome would be a new form of anthropology, still to be constructed, "that would be free from the naive, realistic approach to its object".(6)

Paranoiac experience and reconstruction of the world are given a very special treatment by Lacan. They are a means of creating a new bond in human communities, because they affirm, through the original syntax they make use of, the human ties and capacity for understanding, just as do the creations of art. This is not as far-fetched and paradoxical as it may seem. It can be compared to G Bateson's affirmation that in the Iatmul community, where the complex syntax of matrimonial ties is hopelessly tangled and almost impossible to observe, as a rule, the strange ceremonial of the naven, in which uncle performs as the wife of his sister's sons, through a series of symbolic and imaginary identifications, contribute, in Bateson's estimation, to the soldiering of the social ties in the group, which otherwise would fall apart.(20). I am not suggesting that paranoia is what makes societies hold together; but a certain amount of delusions around which groups can centre is a necessity and the paranoiac's reconstruction of the world is an attempt to match the socially accepted delusion. In the Iatmul community of head-hunters, killing is a deed to be proud of, and celebrated.

Lacan's view on the criminal act, which he unravels around Aimee and the sisters Papin is that it is brought about by the aim of striking at the ideal with which the criminal is identified, and that this always occurs on a brittle threshold in the social structure; "the murderous act is accomplished at a sensitive, a nevralgic spot, in the social tensions."(7) It may be understood that in a way, the murderer has acted to fill in the failing juncture in society, between what it expects of the individual component

of the group and the ideals it holds up as impossible to attain.

This is why the paranoiac can arouse sympathy and Lacan takes Rousseau as an example of the fascination that morbid experience can evoke.

In a certain way we can already sense in this relation Lacan stresses between the social demands and the criminal act, the value he will ascribe later to the symbolic system. There is a gap in meaning, a missing signifier, in the social texture, and for that the paranoiac pays with a gesture that entails a certain amount of social reprobation and penance.

Now, for Lacan and Levi-Straus: Levi-Straus' conception of parental structures as a symbolic system determining the individual's outlook "behind his back", so to speak, did not strike the psychoanalytical theoretician in Lacan like a thunderbolt in a blue sky. Ten years before the publication of ESP, he wrote, in his article for the Encyclopaedia, that family ties do not spring out of anything that can compare with the social phenomena observed in the animals, but that the structure of the family is, from the very first, a cultural structure. That was implicitly criticising the darwinian basis of the freudian myth and stretching it to fit new anthropological views.(8)

In the same article, Lacan states that the Oedipus complex is to be found only in certain social structures - he will refute this later - and cites Malinowski's analysis of the maternal uncle in Melanesia not without pointing out how the division of the parental authority entails an alleviation of repression but also curtails the incentive towards sublimation. In his views, the stronger the father, the stronger the pressure to sublimate. But if Lacan also mentions Rivers and Durkheim in this venture, he is really thinking of Mauss, who tried to link symbolical meanings and their bodily effects in his Essay (1926) on The physical effects in the individual of the idea of death suggested by the collectivity" (9), that Lacan alludes to in his communication (1950) on The function of Psychoanalysis in Criminology. (10)

However, the cultural element recedes in his later speech of 1953, in Rome, to the function of a characteristic constant for a given group, the "little c" function, as a consequence of the value given to the symbolical as opposed and differentiated from the imaginary and the real.(11)

This now familiar distinction between three different levels of reality had already been recognised in the article on the family; Lacan still hesitated in giving the symbolic dominance over the imaginary; when he mentions after

Levi-Straus' famous Essay (1949), the "symbolic efficacy", in his article on the mirror stage(12), he still refers to the captation by an "imago", in accordance with Levi-Straus's idea that homogeneous structures contaminate one another and that the power of speech resides in the possibility of inducing the individual to adhere to a collective myth. In Levi-Straus view, this meant that the structure of the myth found an echo in the structure of the individual, because the structure of the individual is identical to that of his group. But Lacan does not give up what he gathers from his clinical experience, the difference between ego and subject, between identifications on a symbolic level, and captation by the imaginary, the image.

Identification in his theory, is to a signifier, and it causes the subject's alienation; when Lacan speaks of the "dusk of symbolic efficiency" he is referring to the fact that the symbolic wears the mask of the imaginary. In the incantation of the shaman, who induces his patient to health, what happens is really closer to hypnosis than to analysis. If it works, it is due to transference, as Lacan points out, when he says anthropology "obstinately scrutinises the juncture of nature and culture, where only psychoanalysis recognises that knot of imaginary constraint that love always must untie or cut loose."(13)

Lacan comes back to this particular controversy in "Science and Truth"(14), the last of his endeavours to put psychoanalysis on a par with anthropology. It is also contemporary with his publication of the Ecrits and his introduction and rewritings of Function and Field of Speech. I like to stress this because it shows Lacan not giving up his position of 1953, that of the unconscious being the discourse of the Other, and yet it states clearly what to Levi-Straus was a negligible quantity: the subject. In the first of these texts, Lacan put the remarkable heading to: "the subject in question at last", the subject is referred to in relation to the analytical situation. In the last, the subject is referred to in relation to science, magic and religion.

We can in retrospect notice the difference between the supremacy of the symbolic in Levi-Straus and in Lacan if we compare Levi-Straus' sentence "Just like language, the social reality is an autonomous one (the same autonomous reality, by the way); the signifier precedes and determines the signified".(15)

To which Lacan answered, at the very end of Function and Field: "the unconscious of the subject is the other's discourse". (other still written with a small initial).

In Levi-Straus's mind there is no place for the subject except perhaps under the line, in the discourse of the master, and he is reduced to being the bearer of social signifiers, such as the bearers of masks and tatoos, in his article on "The reduplication of representation in the arts of Asia and of America"(16), where he remarks that if the subject does not bear those signifiers of his social meaning, he is reduced to nothingness: the people of his tribe describe him as "stupid". And we can endorse that up to a certain measure. For if the subject is represented by a signifier for another signifier, as demonstrated by Lacan, the subject certainly vanishes in the second signifier and owes any social congruency and continuity only to an image. But in the fact that it is desire that is vehicles this transformation, desire as the motor for putting things into words, then the transformation itself connotes the presence-absence of a subject.

Lacan points this out in Science and Truth, when he criticises Levi-Straus's reduction of the magical efficiency of the symbolic. He notes first that there is a demand, that it can be traced back to its relation to desire such as can be shown on the so-called graph of desire, and that if there is any magic at all, it is of sexual origin.(17) But what makes his remarks pertinent to psychoanalysis is not the sexual reference but the question of the efficiency of the symbolic: in psychoanalysis, knowledge comes to sit in the place of truth whereas in magic knowledge must necessarily be withheld from the subject's grasp.

Essentially, psychoanalysis is bent on formulating a certain relation of the subject to truth and to truth as a cause. Of course, Lacan's system is infinitely more complex than Levi-Straus's since the subject is divided between truth and knowledge and is submitted to a double causation; on the one hand he is the effect of discourse; on the other, his intimate cause is an object of logical consistency which is heterogeneous to the subject or to the chain of signifiers.

One can imagine how this must have seemed hopelessly byzantine to the anthropologists and above all to Levi-Straus, whose beautifully clear cut schemes cleared up the scenes for his field of enquiry.

Now we can come back to the question of structure. It is quite clear that Levi-Straus's structuralism "awoke Lacan from his phenomenological dream" as J A Miller stated in his 1987-89 course on "Causality and assent".

But in Levi-Straus's system we have only one possible structure for the relation of the subject to the symbolic; the subject is always under the line, if we choose to put it in terms of discourses; even if we have two types of discourses, that of the master and that of the university. There is no place for the discourse of the analyst, and not

even for that of the hysteric. I find a rather good illustration of this in the fact that Levi-Straus never so much as attempted to describe a scene of possession, the very word appears as a hapax in his work, in 1950, and is not used again. As for analysts, he somewhat deplores that they are not as good as shamans, on the basis that they let their patients indulge in their own personal myths.

As for Lacan, he went on his solitary way. To him, the supremacy of the symbolic is what embodies the death drive. It introduces the subject to castration and to the real of a missing signifier. So that the subject has no other way out but to try and fill the gap with signifiers, and build his fantasm to cover the ground no signifier can compass.

But as Lacan points out in Radiophonie(18), answering the question as to whether there could be a common field for psychoanalysis and anthropology, since both branches used the notion of structure, no myth is what is summoned in the analytical session. And for one very good reason, that the cure takes place through a particular, private language and allows of no translation; interpretation is not translation. Here, you see, Lacan answers Levi-Straus's mistaken comparison about the individual myth. For, to Levi-Straus, it is a fact that a myth can be translated indefinitely; in other words it can be given out in as many languages as can come handy; it is not attached to the body of the letter. Whereas the only mythical point to which analysis can be reduced is that of the phallus, "whereby what is sexual turns into a passion for signifiers". Lacan sums up in Radiophonie the long standing differences between anthropology and psychoanalysis. Whereas psychoanalysis will lead up to a very simple structure, in any given civilisation, the Freudian Oedipus (the psychoanalytic situation, applied to any culture, will lead up to the Oedipus complex), anthropology puts into writings the enormous quantities of oral knowledge it gathers; this method operates a kind of reduction, grouping the myths into small or large units of signification; but it misses the point of how the subject relates to it. What Lacan makes clear is that psychoanalysis leads to an absence of knowledge about the sexual relation, where anthropology collates the many epical forms given to this absence. For myths are always about the signification of a difference, but it leaves out the subject's metonymic or metaphoric position in the epic.

Lacan underlines the fact that Levi-Straus, by refusing his theory, refuses also everything he has written in "The instance of the letter in the unconscious", which is patently putting the accent on the materiality of signifiers and on the fact that no exchange, no elementary structures of any sort could exist at all if it were not for language.(19)

To sum up the argument, we have two different kinds of operation:

1) Knowledge, in the anthropological shape of the discourse of the master, is turned into the discourse of the university. True to its tradition, anthropology builds up knowledge and is the furthering of knowledge about the Other. Its chief aim is the description of differences and how they are interrelated. Structure, in anthropology, is the interrelation of all possible differences in signification.

2) in psychoanalysis, there is a relating to difference, but not as a comparative study. The aim is the causation of the subject's difference; his relation to knowledge and to truth are not inclusive of a definition of what he is, indeed, he negates the one with the other, signification is forever shifted about. The structure, in psychoanalysis, is inclusive of the subject as a negative agency, but has itself no meaning. If anything, it is a lack of meaning.

To conclude, I will come back to my first question, what is the weight of cultural beliefs in the shaping of neurotic symptoms, psychotic delusions and perverse acts? Can anthropology answer such a query? Can psychoanalysis?

I think they both answer this question, but in a way that cannot be altogether satisfying to us.

Inasmuch as they both hold that the symbolic shapes a person's life, to put things simply, cultural patterns seem to be all-pervading.

But anthropology seems to think that if the individual conforms to a given pattern or structure, he will be all right. If he does not conform to the master's discourse, he will be sick. And a lot has been said on that side of the fence for cultural changes affecting the individual's psychic health. If however, an individual manages to transform cultural patterns, then he might be singled out as having achieved a sublimation. How is this achieved? Nowadays, it seems more likely that he can do so by converting first to the university type of discourse.

For psychoanalysis, the problem has to be thought out along other lines. It aims at discarding beliefs and holding on to a few particular certainties.

These cannot be called beliefs, because they are strictly limited to a subject's relation to his object, the object being defined as what causes the limits of the subject, metaphorising what he is not, or what he lacks. But inasmuch as it has to be circumscribed with signifiers, it can be recognised as a symptom, and finds its bearings in language. So, in a sense, the cultural pattern given by psychoanalysis relieves the so-called neurotic symptom, but cannot discard the symptom altogether.

Now, if we ask ourselves if these patterns of culture, anthropology and psychoanalysis, have their own symptom we may answer that, as a cultural symptom psychoanalysis is bent on bringing about changes; anthropology, although it abstained at times from wanting knowingly to do so, cannot help but bring changes. But as I think you will have perceived, they proceed from different angles, and achieve different results.

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The Object "Alcohol"

by Didier Crenmitier

Drinking involves recourse to a real object, following a model of regression in which when frustration arises, the subject identifies with a signifier and finds himself represented in a scenario of oral jouissance (pleasure) putting him into a situation in which he seeks inebriation as a primordial mode of satisfaction.

Alcoholism is the state in which the subject, in order to find himself represented in a scenario in which he can respond to the Other's demand and symbolise its function or existence, must fall back upon the object "alcohol". Alcohol here constitutes a real object which offsets a lack the subject can no longer symbolise; the subject's structuration can only come about by bringing this lack into the symbolic register. Lacan explains this "bringing into" in detail in his fourth seminar, Object Relations, where he outlines three operations involving lack which come into play in the subject's accession to the symbolic register: frustration, deprivation, and castration.

Lack is, in fact, one of the subject's preconditions, for as he must be represented in the field of the Other, he is obliged to submit to the laws of language. It is then that a cry becomes a call, a calling out to the Other - the Other - being designated by Lacan as the treasure house of the signifier, thanks to which the subject finds himself represented by one signifier for another.

Recourse to alcohol becomes necessary, compensating as it does for a failure on the symbolic level, when the subject is put into the position of having to answer for his place in the structure and to continue to be represented in the signifying chain.

Let us take the case of a woman (Caroline) who, at thirty years of age, became very disturbed, engaging in self-destructive behaviour and serious alcoholism, while previously she had been living normally and seemed perfectly stable. What can this case - whose interest for us is to understand the appearance, at a certain moment, of a serious disturbance leading to a whole series of hospitalisations - teach us?

First of all, this patient is married to a much older man - and we can see in this the persistence of an Oedipal attachment to her father. For, as it turns out, Caroline's husband was one of her father's old friends. (Her father

died when she was about 20). She confirmed our suspicion that she harboured eroticised feelings towards her father in describing moments she spent with him when he took her out alone with him for the weekend.

Shortly before her present problems began, the patient was deeply troubled by the question of whether or not to have a baby. The question was rendered quite delicate as her husband was sterile. She started up a relationship with a man with whom she claimed to experience a kind of pleasure she had never known with her spouse. She envisioned having a baby with her lover while continuing to live with her older husband.

This clinical example provides us with a case history illustrating certain moments of the Oedipal situation as Freud describes it. Lacan points out in his fifth seminar, "Formations of the Unconscious" that "...the desire for the father's penis (penis envy) is more particularly the wish to have a child given (i.e sired) by the father."

This is particularly clear in Caroline's case, for she chose a man who was very similar to her father for her partner in conjugal life. Similarly, her intransigent desire to have a child appears as an absolute necessity conditioning her existence in her current period: lacking a child, she gets drunk to the point of wallowing in degeneracy, moving thus from the position of desiring subject to that of a sort of waste object or product.

Thus her frustration concerning the gift which is the symbolic proof of love - accorded by what Lacan designates as the symbolic father - led her to a structural disturbance which set off a period of regression. According to Lacan, regression can be understood as the replacement of the symbolic object she fails to obtain - as is here the case, given the defaulting figuration of the paternal representation - by a real object, viz. alcohol. Lacan's merit lies in his having been able to masterfully use Freud's work to clarify certain consequences of Freud's discoveries. One such example is his formulation of the imaginary, symbolic, and real registers, which constitute a backdrop for the whole of his teaching. He bases his model of imaginary relationships on the mirror stage, and of the symbolic on the similarity between the fundamental laws of unconscious functioning developed by Freud (eg. displacement and condensation which are characteristic of conversion hysteria) and those of language (eg. metaphor and metonymy). The symbolic as a major point of reference is founded upon the concept 'signifier', borrowed from Ferdinand de Saussure, which Lacan defines as that which represents the subject for another signifier. Lacan's signifier is not perfectly correlated, as is Saussure's, with the signified, but bears rather the mark or trace of

that which specifies the subject of the unconscious. Accession to a symbolic dimension beyond the world of fantasies and of the imaginary, constitutes an essential reference for us- from the viewpoint of theory as well as from that of the handling of the cure. This is illustrated in Lacan's "Schema L", found on page 193 of the Ecrits (English translation, Norton, 1977). The symbolic is, moreover, already there before the real birth of the subject, as he is represented or figured for the Other who speaks of him even before his birth, and in relation to whom he will structure himself. In order to do so, he will have to immerse himself in the signifying code which pre-exists in (or as) the Other; only in that way can he accede to the symbolic. That is why Lacan designates the subject as S (barred subject), rendering visible the subject's alienation and division by the signifier; he also thereby conveys the subject's renunciation of the jouissance characteristic of the primordial links uniting the infant and its first maternal object. This inscription illustrates and transcends, moreover, the notion of castration, for the Oedipal situation also supposes the obligation to conform to a law imposed by the father, distancing the child from his desire for the mother.

Lacan goes on to elaborate the concept of desire on the basis of Freud's term Wunsch, not as a wish presupposing immediate satisfaction, but as reflecting and attesting to an unconscious dimension that specifies the subject and that Lacan radically distinguishes from demand which calls for the satisfaction of a need. He shows this dimension of the subject's desire to be tied up with and founded upon the Other's desire. Acceding to desire thus requires the renunciation of satisfaction and the accession to lack. The importance of this notion of an object which lacks is thoroughly explained in Lacan's work (cf. Seminars IV, X, as well as others). It is the very absence of satisfaction by an object of need which permits the subject to be structured in a dialectic of desire (cf. 'Subversion of the Subject', Ecrits, pps.292-324).

As for the dimension of the real, Lacan defines it as that which always returns to the same place. It is developed at length at many points in Lacan's work, especially in relation to what he invented and designated as object a, what he constructed around the term jouissance, and his formalisation of different modalities of jouissance. One of the ways Lacan approached object a was to introduce it as a remainder, a sort of waste product which was not symbolised in the relationship between the subject and the Other.

The psychotic offers, however, an example of the deformation of the imaginary, symbolic and real registers (cf. schemas "R" and "I" in "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis", Ecrits, pps. 179-224) in which, due

to an irreparable inadequacy in the symbolic, a sort of collapsing of the imaginary into the real takes place; auditory hallucination is one of the examples Lacan provides of the real. The concept of jouissance also provides us with a way of getting a handle on the real in the form of jouissance of the body.

On the basis of our overview of these few aspects of Lacan's work, we can resituate the case of Caroline as resulting from a conjuncture in which alcoholism constitutes the recourse to a kind of oral jouissance which allows for representation in the following scenario involving certain coordinates: Caroline's mother was thirty when she gave birth to Caroline, and it is in strict compliance with the desire of this maternal Other that Caroline felt, when she too reached thirty, an absolute imperative to respond to the unconscious desire which constitutes her with a desire for maternity, so as to maintain herself in the symbolic world which constitutes her. To the extent to which she was unable to constitute herself in relation to the symbolic father - one who would be able to frustrate the real object (frustration being one of the three states, the other two being deprivation and castration, designated by Lacan as necessary in the founding of lack) - she could not substitute a symbolic object (figured by the lacking object) for this frustration at the point at which she was represented in the maternal desire as having to accede to the position of motherhood; for the coordinates in relation to which she constituted herself in the Oedipal situation would not, it seems, permit her to find support in the symbolic father.

In effect, the proximity between her paternal figure and her sexual partner inevitably implies that she possesses, in a certain sense, the father's penis; this impedes her ability to come to terms with lack. It is only with deprivation of the child's imagined object that this object can be really desired and raised to the status of a signifier. In this way, the position of satisfaction is transcended, allowing for the inauguration of a dialectic between the subject and the Other, i.e. the institution of a symbolic relationship in which the object can lack, can be given or not. Instead of an immediate accession to pleasure characteristic of imaginary relationships, and exemplified in need satisfaction, a link of love has to be established - in the sense in which love is the gift of what one doesn't have.

In Caroline's case, an inadequacy altered this process - which is not to be understood as a progression by stages but rather as a structural disposition existing from the outset - and she was unable to sustain herself with the representation of a symbolic father; she was, rather, destined to find recourse in alcohol as a readjustment of her being by means of oral jouissance, as an ineluctable response to the playing out of her desire which could no longer find its comforting guarantee in the symbolic Other.