

Some Reflections on Lacanian Theory in Relation to Other Currents in Contemporary Psychoanalysis

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I would like to say, to all those who are listening to me, how they can recognize bad psychoanalysts; this is by the word they use to deprecate all technical or theoretical research that carries forward the Freudian experience along its authentic lines. That word is "intellectualization"... (Lacan, 1977, p.171).

But it seems to me that, once grounded in the fundamentals of theory, the important thing is to be constantly testing ideas by the evidence that patients bring. To care for people is more important than to care for ideas, which can be good servants but bad masters, and my interests have always been primarily in clinical work rather than in theory as such (Guntrip, 1971, p.27).

I. The Question of Obscurantism

Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984, ch.7) opens her essay, "A Psychoanalytic Study of Falsehood," by summarizing Hans

Christian Anderson's story, "The Nightingale." An ordinary appearing little bird whose exquisite singing initially brought tears to the Chinese Emperor's eyes has its place at court usurped by a jewel-encrusted but artificial and mechanical bird "which could sing thirty times over the same tune at a tempo the real nightingale could not sustain" (p.67)--that is, until the day the usurper's mechanism jammed. As the story goes, the dying Emperor's life was only saved by the sweet song of the real nightingale who reappears in its master's time of need. Chasseguet-Smirgel informs us that: "This fable is said to have been written in honour of Jenny Lind, called 'The Swedish Nightingale', whose success had been overshadowed for a while by the more precise technique of some Italian singers; their technique, in fact, hid a lack of real talent" (p.68).

In light of various comments in her own writings and in those of Grunberger (1971) which might be interpreted as oblique critical allusions to Lacanism, when Chasseguet-Smirgel states that "I happen to live in a country, in a town and at a time when false values--aesthetic and intellectual as well as ethical--seem to be gratified with admiration and success at the expense of 'true' values" (p.66), one wonders whether in addition to commenting critically upon the fads and foibles of the Parisian scene in general she might also be expressing a feeling that the unpretentious, ordinary-appearing nightingale of traditional analysis had been temporarily displaced, especially in certain avant-garde intellectual circles in France, by an initially impressive but ultimately disappointing and inauthentic Lacanian usurper.

Despite the notorious obscurity of Lacan's (1977) language, which is riddled with puns, multiple meanings, obscure

allusions to abstruse philosophical ideas and wide-ranging cultural references, such that it constitutes a kind of museum of European culture and demands for its decoding a breadth of scholarship and cultural sophistication that exceeds both the capacity and the patience of most contemporary readers, his writings, not to mention his mystique (Clement, 1983; Schneiderman, 1983; Turkle, 1978), continue to be an object of fascination for intellectuals in a variety of fields in the humanities and social sciences, especially literary and cinematic theory, as well as in psychoanalysis itself (Smith & Kerrigan, 1983). As Gallop (1985) has suggested, one of the most significant things about Lacan has been his capacity, something not to be sneezed at in a psychoanalyst, to evoke a range of transferences, not all by any means exclusively positive or idealizing, from those who come into contact with him, either personally (now no longer possible since his death in 1981), or through his arcane writings, or even through his reputation alone. I suspect there are few psychoanalysts today who, even if they have not read a single word by Lacan, have not formed some opinion or affective disposition toward him.

But someone's mere ability to evoke transferences is in itself no indication of his value, authenticity or good faith: after all, most con men rely upon this capacity. Freud himself for a time thought Fliess was a genius. And who, after a love affair has terminated, has not scratched his (or her) head in puzzlement over what he (she) could ever have seen in her (him)? As we all know, one of the functions of our analytic abstinence and relative silence is to cloak ourselves in a certain obscurity the better to evoke the analysand's transference fantasies, a process that might well be aborted if the patient were prematurely and traumatically presented

with the dismal evidence of our human-all-too-human selves.

While Lacan did not refrain from speaking and writing, some might think he might just as well have done, for he seems to have evolved a mode of expression that at times seems even more impenetrable than the most determined of analytic silences. Reminding us of "The snare laid by the Sphinx with its riddles, obscuring... understanding with sybilline language and oracular ritual," Grunberger (1971) points out that: "Enigma per se is a sadistic genre, for posing a riddle is always laying an anal trap. One confronts the other with a problem or obstacle, while enjoying absolute mastery oneself. ... Obscurity is in itself an anal trap: one 'hoodwinks' one's victim or 'keeps him in the dark'" (pp. 300-301). The Lacanian text not only frustrates by its obscurity, frequently having led me at least to the point of giving up in exasperation and angrily dismissing the man as an obscurantist, but to make matters simultaneously better and worse, every so often it seemed to offer a comprehensible insight of sufficient brilliance and importance to make it impossible to overcome the transference attachment to this frustrating yet fascinating object. Perhaps, one felt, if only one read on, tried harder, consulted yet another secondary source promising to elucidate the Lacanian mysteries, sources which themselves, I found, were increasingly more obscure than the object they promised to illumine--perhaps then all would become clear and one would find himself in possession of a rare and valuable type of psychoanalytic wisdom of which Lacan and the Lacanians appeared to hold a monopoly. Once again, Grunberger's (1971) remarks are of relevance, whether or not the Sphinx this French Psychoanalyst had in mind was his officially defrocked, and thereby all the more eminent, colleague Lacan:

For one thing, the obscurity of the oracle's language permits all sorts of interpretations in terms of the narcissism of the person inquiring, even if he must pay with fear and trembling, which at a deeper level, moreover, are really linked to pleasure. (The technique of doling out obscurities is familiar to those who abuse the public's credulity, and an unbroken line leads from sorcerers and seers to astrologers, diviners, conjurers, and fortunetellers.) Fortunetellers both conceal and promise, lead on and then put off until tomorrow, which assures them a faithful and permanent clientele. They are constantly making out drafts against the future, a system that allows them to remain in the abstract, the vague and hazy, in allusions, paradoxical statements, and slogans, in order always to leave a window open onto a future where everything will be possible, where there will be a free lunch, and where, finally, the donkey will get to eat the carrot.

Contact with the astrologer or fortuneteller immediately plunges the subject into the primary process where reason and logic lose their power. A few seductive gestures suffice, but also merely ambiguity or obscurity (the language itself must be marked by the ineffable). With regression thus established, one is carried away in rapture and the doors open onto a narcissistic universe of infinite possibilities--one only need believe. But, if the diviner installs the subject in that universe, at the same time he deprives him of the necessary means to get out of it. The subject will not move, but he will

escape the anguish that accompanies maturation
(p.300).

But these are indeed equivocal words of criticism coming from a psychoanalyst, for as Grunberger surely recognizes, that unbroken line leading from sorcerers to fortunetellers leads on to hypnotists and then to psychoanalysts, who must also be masters of the art of leading on and then putting off until tomorrow, of remaining at crucial moments in the vague and hazy, of dealing in allusions and paradoxical statements, but hopefully not in slogans, and never--Heaven forbid!--promising a free lunch (Freud's offerings of the herring notwithstanding). The point is that if there was something of the mystagogue about Lacan, perhaps, as psychoanalysts, we recognize something of ourselves in this.

But surely, a voice emanating from a sense of the real seriousness and dignity of our calling insists, there is more to the art of analysis than those elements that a scientific psychotherapy has inherited from its, best forgotten, distant ancestors, the practitioners of the black arts? And at this point we find ourselves faced once again with the question: Is there nothing more to Lacan than obscurantism and a mystifying appeal to our narcissism?

Since I, for one, find the best way to dispel the transference effects, to return from regression, the primary process and the narcissistic universe, is to think and eventually write about the infatuation--or is it that I am only able to think and write once the infatuation has already been dispelled?--the following reflections embody something of my attempt to settle accounts with Lacan, and move on. (But, of course, I have already moved on: that is why I am able now to settle

accounts.) One of the exasperating and fascinating things about Lacan is that he himself has taught us about this very process and given us the means to conceptualize it. He would say that after a period of Imaginary identification, one sometimes manages to return to the Symbolic. And Lacan leaves us with the impression that, as with every psychoanalyst worth his salt, the very transference effect he works upon us, the very regression he induces, is ultimately in the service of a wider degree of self-knowledge: ideally, one returns from an infatuation with Lacan, as from any good analysis, with, among other things, a deeper understanding of the processes of regression, transference, narcissism, identification and fascination. In this sense, just as Freud seemed to prefer the more independent-minded of his students over his slavish followers and imitators, so the best students of Lacan can hardly remain Lacanians. The tragedy, in both cases, is that so many of them do (Roustang, 1976).

II. Returning to Freud: With a Difference.

At the very moment when psychoanalysis was being relegated to the margins of an ever more biologically reductionist psychiatry, the Freud industry was booming in the universities. Regrettably, however, the academic assimilation of psychoanalysis frequently took the form of impossibly intellectualized, abstracted and affectively isolated versions of analytic theory, such as that of Lacan, which bear little resemblance to psychoanalysis as it is understood and experienced by those of us who are daily engaged in analytic dialogue with living, breathing people who actually experience emotions, often of an excruciatingly

painful sort. Nevertheless, since I believe that while his writings are certainly highly intellectualized and unnecessarily obscure, Lacan can in no way be dismissed as a mere obscurantist, before turning to criticism, I will attempt to give some indication of what I find of value in his work. In doing so, I am in no way claiming any particular expertise regarding Lacan, nor even any adequate understanding of his work as a totality, not least because so much of it remains obscure to me. However, with this proviso in mind, as someone who has devoted some time and energy to struggling with Lacan, let me attempt to outline a few of the conclusions I've arrived at.

If I were to single out what to me is one of the most important contributions of Lacanian theory it would have to be: the deliteralization of Freudian concepts. The great German sociologist, Max Weber (1953), has written of the social process he called "the routinization of charisma." This is the process whereby the living concepts and ideas of a great charismatic leader come, especially after his death, to be reduced or frozen into a range of simple but lifeless formulae to be routinely administered by unimaginative bureaucrats in the institutions set up in the leader's name. Weber, of course, had in mind the fate of the spirit of Jesus at the hands of institutional Christianity. Lacan was concerned that something rather similar had happened to the spirit of Freud at the hands of the International Psychoanalytic Association. But the Lacanian critique goes further than that, for Lacan believed that the degeneration of Freudian thinking was evident even in the later work of Freud himself whose increasingly abstract metapsychological speculations, particularly the increasing emphasis upon the psychology of the ego, amounted to a betrayal of the fundamental

psychoanalytic discovery of the workings of the unconscious as set forth at the turn of the century in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905).

But even aside from the problem of the rise of metapsychology and ego psychology, Freud's clinical concepts, even at times in his own hands, occasionally succumbed to a literalism incompatible with psychoanalysis as a science of psychic as opposed to anatomical or biological reality. Take, for example, the theory of the Oedipus and castration complexes. Students have often told me that only once this theory was presented to them in a deliteralized (i.e., Lacanian) form, could they begin to appreciate its real human meaning and importance. No wonder the theory seems incredible and is frequently rejected in favour of other psychologies when it is presented as the child's literal desire for sexual intercourse with one parent with an accompanying wish for the death of the other, wishes that are only repressed due to fear of literal castration or equivalent bodily mutilation at the hands of the rival parent. This literalism is particularly evident in Freud's (1924b; 1925) mistaken belief that castration anxiety is restricted to males and penis envy to females on the grounds that women cannot fear a castration that has already taken place and men cannot envy what they already possess. Simply by distinguishing between the literal penis and the symbolic penis or phallus, Lacan (1977, ch.8) helps us to see the very evident facts of female castration anxiety, as the fear of the loss of the phallus (i.e., anything that has phallic significance for a woman: her breasts, legs, looks, doctorate, career, husband, analyst, etc.), as well as the rampant penis (phallus) envy of men (who are frequently consumed with envy of the success, women, money,

automobiles, houses, publications, etc. of their rivals).

It is symptomatic of the intellectually retarding hold that such literalism has over the minds of even the most distinguished psychoanalysts, that not even Anna Freud or Charles Brenner are able to bring themselves to speak of male penis envy, even when the clinical data they are summarizing cry out for such a formulation. Writing of a ten-year-old boy who imagined he owned a circus and was a lion tamer, Anna Freud (1937) tells of his fantasy regarding a thief who shot at him. The animals banded together and punished the thief: "They kept him a prisoner, buried him, and triumphantly made an enormous tower over him out of their own bodies. ... Before they finally released him, a long row of elephants beat him with their trunks, last of all threatening him with uplifted finger (!) and warning him never to do it again" (p. 76). Anna Freud points out that the elephant trunks and the uplifted finger were attributes of his father held to be of great importance (one thinks of the giant's magical possessions in Jack, the Giant-Killer in this connection), but although she states that "in his fantasy he took them from the father whom he envied and, having assumed them himself, got the better of him" (p. 77), she avoids any explicit recognition of this as a case of male penis envy.

Yet again, stating that "We do not as a rule see anything abnormal in the small boy who wants to be a big man and plays at being 'Daddy,' having borrowed his father's hat and stick for the purpose" (p. 88), Anna Freud goes on to describe a little boy who "would fall into a state of extreme ill humor whenever he saw an unusually tall or powerful man" (p. 88). He developed the habit, first of wearing his father's hat, and

later of compulsively clutching a peaked cap in his hand wherever he went: on one occasion, needing his hands for something else, he placed the cap in the opening in the front of his leather breeches. Although Anna Freud writes that "The envy of the little boy ... was continually excited by the men whom he saw around him, so he confronted them persistently with the hat, cap or rucksack which he regarded as a tangible proof of his own masculinity" (p. 90), she nevertheless does not formulate this clinical vignette as an instance of male penis envy. Of course, the psychodynamic situation is somewhat different depending upon whether one feels one has no phallus at all; or had one that was stolen or removed; or has one that is grossly inadequate in comparison to that of others. But while such differences must not be ignored, it is nevertheless the case that they all frequently result in greater or lesser degrees of penis (phallus) envy in both sexes.

Among the several useful and long overdue revisions to classical theory undertaken by Brenner (1982), is his recognition of the fact of female castration anxiety. Against Freud's belief in its non-existence, Brenner writes: "The logic of this position seems incontrovertible. One cannot lose what one does not have. Yet it is contradicted by abundant clinical experience. There are women who show every sign of intense castration anxiety ... Indeed, all women show evidence of a considerable degree of castration anxiety ..." (p. 97). Brenner goes on to explain that what is involved is a fantasied penis (the Lacanian phallus), as opposed to a literal one. "Girls in the oedipal phase regularly fantasize that they are boys. They regularly imagine that they have a penis. ... Her fantasied penis ... is real to her. It is real enough that anything symbolizing the idea that it may be injured or lost

arouses anxiety which is comparable to the castration anxiety of a boy ..." (p.97). But while speaking of penis envy as an outcome of the female's depressive sense of having been castrated, and while pointing out that some males (e.g., those suffering from physical defects which symbolize castration in their minds, or those who have adopted a defensive feminine identification) also suffer from castration depressive affect, from the feeling of having been castrated, Brenner still does not balance his recognition of female castration anxiety by a recognition of male penis (phallus) envy.

By distinguishing the phallus from the penis, Lacan not only liberates psychoanalysis to operate on its own appropriate level, that of psychic as opposed to anatomical or biological reality, but in so emancipating it from a reductive literalism, he frees it from the sexism founded upon such literalism expressed in the notion that "anatomy is destiny."

Psychoanalysis is not about anatomy at all, but about the meanings and phantasies about anatomy, among other things, that shape the psychic and emotional lives of human subjects. The mere absence of a penis is no bar to feeling phallic. The mere presence of a penis is no guarantee against feeling castrated. Practically speaking, many will say, we have always know this. But why has such practical clinical knowledge not found its way more explicitly into our literature? In any case, it is precisely Lacan's concern with these issues that has caused his work to be one of the major inspirations of the psychoanalytic feminism of the seventies and eighties (Lacan, 1983; Mitchell, 1974), however much this feminism has sought to criticize Lacan's own phallocentrism (Irigaray, 1974; 1977).

III. The Humanization of the Unconscious

Not only does Lacan deliteralize Freudian concepts, but he liberates them from the biologism of Freudian instinct theory (and, as we shall see, relocates them within what is essentially a theory of narcissism or the self). For example, Lacan makes a fundamental distinction between organic need, on the one hand, which exists on the biological level and is shared by both human beings and animals, and human desire, on the other, which arising from an inner sense of absence established in the human psyche as a semiotic system of differences and distinctions (between subject and object, signifier and signified), is uniquely human. Animals and preverbal infants need, but they do not desire, for desire can only exist on the basis of the sense of lack from which it originates. This sense of lack can itself exist only on the basis of the symbolic subject/object or self/other distinction which places a bar (/) or gap between self and other, generating a sense of the self as a lack of the other, a sense of lack or absence (Fort!) which gives rise to desire for that comforting presence (Da!) that is felt to be missing (Freud, 1920).

In redefining the castration complex to include the primal cut between subject and object which establishes the inner absence, nothingness or "lack of being" which generates desire, Lacan re-situates psychoanalysis as a theory of desire and aggression in a semiotic rather than a biologicistic context. For despite the growing criticism of Strachey's misleading translations of key Freudian concepts (see Bettelheim, 1982, among many others), the fact remains that while Freud (1915b) did not employ the German word Instinkt connoting a biologically fixed and relatively unchangeable animal instinct (such as that of the salmon to swim upstream or the

bear to hibernate), he nevertheless insisted that the Triebe (the "drives") arise from a somatic source, however modifiable they may be in aim and object. For Lacan, psychoanalysis is certainly a psychology of desire and aggression, but human desire and aggression, while obviously dependent upon a neurological substrate, have their source not in the body but in the human mind as a semiotic system. Interestingly, Brenner (1982, ch.2) himself eventually arrived at this conclusion: since the entire human psyche rests on a neurological substrate, id is no more biological, no closer to "nature" or "human nature", than ego and superego, a view which, while certainly correct, has the consequence of undermining the ego-psychological image of man as a centaur, a creature half- animal, half-human, and of psychic conflict as a battle between these two components of his being.

While Guntrip (1971) was justifiably critical of the centaur model of man, he mistakenly identified it with the classical psychoanalytic perspective, thereby failing to remember that until *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905b), psychoanalytic theory operated virtually entirely without an instinct theory. In his revolutionary work on dreams (1900), slips (1901) and jokes (1905a), in which he traced the laws and mechanisms structuring the primary processes of the system unconscious, Freud offered a semiotic and hermeneutic theory, a theory of de-coding and interpretation of significations, symbols and meanings, rather than a biologicistic or mechanistic theory of the sort that increasingly came to dominate his metapsychology. But unlike certain recent hermeneutic theorists who are content to sacrifice the claims of psychoanalysis to be a science, Lacan insisted upon its scientific status: while not a biological

science, psychoanalysis is for Lacan a semiotic science of the structure of the unconscious mind. Against the tendency of psychoanalytic ego psychology to reduce the unconscious id to "a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations" (Freud, 1933, p. 73), a view which attributes all psychological form and structure to the synthetic functions of the ego, Lacan insists, against Freud himself, upon the distinctive Freudian discovery of the structure of unconscious mental life. As Hanly (1986) has pointed out, "Lacan ... reminds us that the roots of two of the basic form-generating devices of art are to be found in primary process thought" (p. 11). Although he identifies condensation with metonymy and displacement with simile, metaphor and symbolism, rather than the other way around as in Lacan's (1977, p.160) own view, we can still agree with Hanly that "It is the business of primary process thought to generate these formal elements in new constellations of images richly endowed with meaning through many associative connections" (p.11).

As Lacan understood, the unconscious and its primary processes, far from representing a subhuman, asocial, and precultural chaos of drive energies, is already symbolically, that is, culturally structured in accordance with the very laws of condensation and displacement that Freud discovered, and which Lacan, following Jakobson (Jakobson & Halle, 1956, pp.69-96), recognized as the laws of substitution (metaphor) and combination (metonymy) which compose the synchronic and diachronic axes of linguistic structure respectively. For Lacan (1977, ch.5), the widespread resistance to psychoanalysis does not arise from its depiction of a primitive and instinctual substrate of the mind, but rather from its revelation of the uniquely human and symbolically structured nature of the unconscious, a

discovery that thwarts any attempt to find in the unconscious any purely "natural" self, any pre-social "human nature," as a basis for either a critique or a defense of the social order.

Yet that is what we must resign ourselves to. The unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual; what it knows about the elementary is no more than the elements of the signifier. ... It is the abyss opened up at the thought that a thought should make itself heard in the abyss that provoked resistance to psychoanalysis from the outset. And not, as is commonly said, the emphasis on man's sexuality. This latter has after all been the dominant object in literature throughout the ages (Lacan, 1977, p.171).

The dehumanization of the unconscious effected by psychoanalytic ego psychology represents a regression in Freud's own thinking as well as that of later ego psychologists to an essentially pre-Freudian rationalistic philosophy of mind-body dualism and a centaur model of man in which a rational (ego) and moral (superego) rider struggles to control and direct the primitive beast (id) upon which it is precariously perched (Freud, 1933, lecture 31). This conception has created enormous difficulties both in clinical and applied psychoanalysis. In the former field it encourages a culturally conformist view of psychoanalytic therapy as promoting the domination, domestication or socialization of the id by a socially adapted ego and superego. In the latter, particularly in the theory of creativity, its emphasis upon the ego as the source of artistic form leads to neglect of the form-generating structures of the primary process. The dehumanization of the primary

process has led to a fear of the id based on a one-sided view of it as demonic, a conception that ignores the fact that the unconscious is also a source of wisdom, vitality, creativity and healing. Ironically, the ego-psychological dictum that the analyst ought to retain a position of psychic neutrality "equidistant from the id, the ego, and the superego" (Anna Freud, 1937, p. 28) is nullified by the bias of psychoanalytic ego psychology against the id arising from its falsely primitivized conceptualization. In Freud's (1930) pessimistic and culturally conservative sociopolitical ideology, in which the claims of culture (as represented by the ego and superego) are forever in conflict with those of nature (as represented by the id), and in which repression and resulting neurosis are the price of civilized order, we see the reactionary ideological consequences of the failure to recognize that, in a significant sense, the unconscious is always already cultural and the id is profoundly and uniquely human. For, as Freud himself taught us, unconscious mental life, far from being a meaningless chaos, is meaningfully structured through condensation (metaphor) and displacement (metonymy), rhetorical tropes that represent key elements of our distinctively human symbolic behaviour.

IV. The Mirror Stage: A Self Psychology With a Difference

Whereas Freud, especially in his metapsychology, tended to "biologize" his psychology, Lacan might be said to "narcissize" psychoanalysis, viewing both desire and aggression as manifestations of the struggles of the human "ego", which for Lacan is not one structure of the mental apparatus, but the self- image or self-representation, as in Freud's own pre-structural theory of the Ich or "I" as an object

of experience or representation (whatever additional meanings were sometimes attached to it). Since the concepts of Lacanian theory have an overlapping significance, it is necessary to situate such concepts as the phallus and the process of oedipalization in the broader context of Lacan's fundamental theory of the nature and origin of the ego.

According to Lacan (1977, ch.1), at about six months of age the preverbal infant enters into what he called "the mirror stage". Experiencing itself as fragmented and uncoordinated (*le corps morcelé*: the body in bits and pieces) due to its biological prematurity or neoteny, the infant is enthralled by the cohesion and impressive unity (that is, the phallic quality) of its image in the mirror. Feeling fragmented, incomplete and castrated, a self "cut off" from the primal (m)other, the infant forms a defensive or compensatory identification with its phallic mirror- image. For Lacan, the child seeks less to have the phallus than to be the phallus for the mother. Hence, desire is fundamentally narcissistic. Interestingly, while fundamentally disagreeing with other aspects of Lacanian theory, Grunberger (1971) appears to share Lacan's reversal of Freud's (1914a) view of narcissism as one of the vicissitudes of libido, instead of viewing libido as one of the vicissitudes of narcissism (a viewpoint which was implicit in Sartre's [1943] existential theory of sexuality). As Grunberger (1971) explains: "Instinctual life, in its many and varied manifestations, is rooted in and directed by the narcissistic factor, that is, it is both the expression of and the means of action of narcissism--hence primacy belongs to the latter. The need 'to satisfy oneself' stands out in psychic relief only because the subject also wants to feel autonomous, capable of satisfying himself and deserving of satisfaction" (p. 88).

Lacanian theory is certainly a theory of narcissism or the self, but in contrast to theories such as that of Fairbairn (1952) which posit a "pristine whole ego" at the beginning which is only subject to splitting due to bad object-relations experience, or theories which view fragmentation as resulting from "not-good-enough" mothering (Winnicott, 1965) or from empathic failure on the part of the early selfobjects (Kohut, 1977), inner fragmentation, emptiness and lack are, for Lacan, simply part of the human condition and, in promoting the "acceptance of castration," psychoanalysis seeks to help us to accommodate ourselves to this "reality".

Lacan's tendency to universalize or existentialize the experience of emptiness and non-identity, his "metaphysics of absence," is, from a dialectical perspective, no more convincing than the tendency of one-sidedly optimistic schools of psychoanalytic thought to privilege inner fullness, presence, identity and cohesion as somehow more fundamental or real than the experience of fragmentation. While the latter perspectives evade recognition of the splitting and conflict that are an inevitable feature of the human condition, the former, in remaining faithful to the Freudian tendency to privilege a vision of inner conflict as somehow truer than one of inner harmony (Brenner, 1982), runs the risk of failing to sufficiently explore the ways in which inner disharmony and emptiness, "the basic fault" (Balint, 1968), emerge, above and beyond "the human condition," from early deprivation or traumatization of various types.

Rather than being either pleasure-seeking (Freud, 1905b), or object-seeking (Fairbairn, 1952), libido, for Lacan, might be said to be essentially self-seeking. Rather than wanting to

possess, consume or use the other as a means to instinctual satisfaction, or to establish a relationship with the other as other, in the Lacanian view my desire is the desire of the other: that is, I desire to be the object of the other's desire, the apple of the other's eye. Which is to say that I desire to be what the other lacks and, hence, desires. But, by definition, what the other lacks and desires is the phallus for, according to Lacan, whatever is felt to be lacking and therefore desirable assumes a phallic significance (an equation that will be questioned below). But rather than taking the phallic image of wholeness and perfection as an ideal to be pursued--i.e., as an ego-ideal--the child, according to Lacan, mistakes the image for himself, that is, he identifies with the mirror-image, with the phallus, and this misrecognition constitutes the basis of his ego as self-image. For Lacan, then, the "ego" (the "I" or self- image) emerges through a misidentification of the infant subject with its mirror-image, with the phallus of the (m)other, and, subsequently, with the images of others and the images reflected by others and by the sociocultural environment in general.

One apparent and problematic difference between Lacanian theory and both ego and self psychologies concerns Lacan's view of the essentially pathological nature of the ego or the self which, rather than needing strengthening through analysis or "transmuting internalization" (Kohut, 1977), constitutes the major obstacle to the therapeutic liberation of the "subject" from the idolatry of the ego-image by which it is captivated. Some of the seeming irreconcilability between approaches which seek to enhance ego strength or the cohesion of the self, on the one hand, and the Lacanian aim of undermining the ego or self in favour of the liberation of the subject, on the other, may be overcome when we remember

that, for Lacan, "ego" or "self" refer to images or representations: what is to be undermined or therapeutically relaxed is, for Lacan, an essentially defensive and constrictive "false self" constructed out of an anal-sadistic need for mastery and control and which is associated with the opposition of Thanatos to Eros. Clearly, the "true self" the development of which Winnicott (1960) sought to encourage, and the "cohesive self" that Kohut (1977) sought to "restore" (implying it was there to begin with?), bear a far greater resemblance to Lacan's "subject" than to his "ego"; while the latter would seem to more closely resemble Winnicott's (1960) compliant or conformist "false self".

Nevertheless, the Lacanian hostility toward the "ego" and the one-sided emphasis upon its deconstruction in favour of the "subject", seems to me to neglect the fact that psychoanalytic therapy is, at times, quite legitimately constructive. For psychoanalysis is just as much concerned to conjointly construct as to deconstruct an analytic narrative, life-history and identity. Certainly it is the case that some of our patients, particularly the more "difficult" ones who tend to be labelled narcissistic or borderline, are as much in need of assistance in constructing as in deconstructing a self. In my own view, neither of these components of the analytic process can afford to be neglected in favour of the other.

The Lacanian "ego" forever remains an alienating image, a socially constructed persona, necessarily split off from the "subject" which, as long as the ego is dominant, is subject to repression and, being unconscious, speaks only in the form of a return of the repressed. As the product of a misidentification between the subject and the mirror-image arising from a failure to differentiate or distinguish between

the two, the "ego" serves as the foundation for any number of similar fusional identifications of the self with the images of others and of objects, identifications which, taken together, constitute what Lacan termed the Imaginary order of experience. Since, at root, Imaginary experience is a continuation of the child's illusory sense of being the phallus for the mother, and of being the image in the mirror, it reflects a failure of the oedipalization process to effect a differentiation between the subject and the ego-image, on the one hand, and between the subject and the phallus, on the other. The latter distinction requires an oedipalized awareness on the part of the child that another, ordinarily the father, rather than the self, occupies the position of the phallus for the mother.

Since, in the Imaginary, any fundamental difference or otherness is denied, experience is constituted either in terms of identity or opposition, for opposition is not essential difference: it is merely the negative or inverse of identity. Imaginary experience is characterized, therefore, both by undifferentiation and fusion on the one hand and, on the other, by a kind of black and white thinking, a splitting of objects and the self into such binary opposites as identical/antithetical, good/bad, strong/weak, or phallic/castrated. It is to this primitive level of experience that we have regressed when, for example, we feel that the other is either for us or against us, thereby evading the ambiguity and ambivalence which, unless we advance to more differentiated and integrated levels of mentation, we are unable to tolerate. In the Imaginary world, since there exists no middle ground between, for example, incorporation and expulsion, total identity or total opposition, intersubjective experience takes on the sado-masochistic

quality of the Hegelian "master-slave dialectic" (Casey & Woody, 1983; Ver Eecke, 1983) or the Sartrean (1943) "battle to the death of consciousnesses" in which "hell is other people": since it is the narcissistic aim of each ego to be the phallus for the other, and since it seems as if only one can occupy the phallic position at any one time, experience takes on the desperation and potential violence of a game of musical chairs in which all those who have failed to occupy the phallic position are by that very fact subjected to castration. Hence, in the Lacanian view, not only is desire fundamentally narcissistic in that it is a desire to be the object of the other's desire, but aggression, far from arising from a primordial, biologically-based, death-instinct, or even from a simple instinct of aggression, is also essentially narcissistic in that it is a reaction to frustration of the narcissistic wish to occupy the phallic position, to be the exclusive object of the other's desire. In other words, in the Lacanian view, as in that of Kohut (1972), aggression amounts, to all intents and purposes, to narcissistic rage.

For Lacan, the preverbal mirror phase and the Imaginary order of experience which is its psychic continuation are, on the one hand, narcissistic and fusional and, on the other, divided or split into primitive binary oppositions because the gap or bar which both separates self and other, and which itself constitutes a third term between or above the polar opposites, is insufficiently established in the psyche. But somewhere around eighteen months the mirror phase normally gives way before the process of oedipalization or socialization through which the social and linguistic distinctions between mother and infant, male and female, adult and child which make up the Symbolic or cultural order of experience begin to be internalized. For Lacan, our

patriarchal cultural order is constituted by the law of the father, the incest taboo, which in Lacanian theory is less a matter of the prohibition of literal incest than of the interdiction of that type of mental incest represented by the subject-object confusions and oppositions, identities and antitheses, characteristic of the Imaginary as opposed to the Symbolic.

The oedipalization process disrupts both the fusional identifications and the splitting or binary organization of the Imaginary through a process of triangulation: the Symbolic father enters the scene as a third term and performs the phallic function of disrupting the symbiosis, opening up a space between mother and child and, at the same time, as a third term, displacing the purely binary divisions of the Imaginary in favour of the triadic structure of the Symbolic. It is important to realize that, for Lacan, what is at stake here is not the appearance of a literal father, but rather the operation of the Symbolic father, the paternal function or metaphor, which Lacan refers to as *le-nom-du-père*, the Name-of-the-Father, which is homophonic in French with *le-non-du-père*, the "No" of the father. The paternal or phallic function, whether literally performed by father, mother, sibling or anyone or anything else (it can, for example, be performed by "Father Time" who disrupts the Imaginary fusion of analysand and analyst by reminding both that "that's all the time we have for today"), is to prohibit both the fusional identifications and the binary oppositions that constitute the Imaginary order.

V. Phallocentrism

While Lacan appears to have viewed the equation between anything valued and the phallus in the context of an apparently universal patriarchal culture, some have felt that he failed to make sufficiently clear the phallogocentric basis of this association. In addition, it can be argued that he failed to sufficiently emphasize the fact that the primary object of desire during the pre-oedipal or matriarchal epoch preceding the superimposition of a patriarchal revaluation of all values during the oedipalization process is the breast-mother, whose value is later suppressed in favour of the phallus -- the pre-oedipal mother even being retrospectively accorded a phallus so that the patriarchal law (where there is power there must be a phallus; where there is no power there can be no phallus) may in this way be maintained. Here lies the basis for a feminist critique of Lacan's own phallogocentrism, his alleged failure to be sufficiently aware of the longing for origin, for the mother, behind the desire for the phallus (Irigaray, 1974; 1977).

On the other hand, since, for Lacan, one's desire is not to have the phallus, but to be the phallus for another, originally for the mother, the claim that he neglects the infant's pre-oedipal involvement with the mother is equivocal, to say the least. If, for the sake of argument, we accept Lacan's view of desire as primordially narcissistic, that is, that the infant's desire is to be the object of the mother's desire, then it is perhaps legitimate to say that he insufficiently emphasized the fact that the association between the object of the mother's desire and the phallus, that is to say, the phallic signification of the object of the mother's desire, the idea that the mother desires the phallus and that one must therefore be the phallus in order to be the object of her desire, is a phallogocentric and patriarchal equation which is

superimposed upon the valuations of the pre-oedipal, matriarchal universe. Perhaps, primordially, the child simply wants to be the object of the mother's desire, the apple of her eye. The notion that to be valued is to be phallic would certainly appear to be a function of the dominant codes of a phallogentric cultural order.

On the other hand, it can be argued that one of the strengths of the Lacanian perspective is its rejection of the either/or thinking which falsely separates oedipal from pre-oedipal issues, neurotic pathology from narcissistic or self pathology, and its insistence on the interrelatedness of oedipal and identity (or separation-individuation) issues as two aspects of a single psychic complex. By deliteralizing or metaphorizing the Oedipus complex as the division of an Imaginary unity into a duality, Lacan extends it into what in other perspectives is considered the pre-oedipal period, regarding self-object differentiation as an oedipal issue.

There can be little doubt, however, that the work of Lacan, like that of Freud himself, is pervaded by a patriarchal bias which, broadly speaking, takes the form of what I have called (Carveth, 1987) a metaphysics of absence. In contrast to the metaphysics of presence which Derrida (1976; Culler, 1982) views as central to our Western "phallogentric" tradition and which privileges presence (Da!) over absence (Fort!), and the matriarchal values of union and similarity over the patriarchal virtues of separateness and difference, the metaphysics of absence, rather than transcending these binary oppositions, simply reverses the hierarchies. In the metaphysics of absence, our phallogentrism takes the form of a denial, not of absence, separation and lack (as a defence against castration anxiety), but rather of presence, connection

and plenitude, which somehow constitute a threat to a patriarchal order of differences and distinctions. As Gilligan (1982), among others, has pointed out, whereas women in our culture come to define themselves in terms of their connections with others and, hence, are preoccupied with their responsibilities to others and threatened by the dangers of separation and individuation, men are more likely to define themselves as separate and autonomous and are anxious to defend their rights and freedoms against the danger of incursions by others, a threat which evokes fears of engulfment, undifferentiation and loss of self in the face of relationship.

On a deeper level, the patriarchal insistence upon the facts of separateness and difference, its emphasis upon boundaries and limits, and upon the gap, space, nothingness or "lack of being" between self and other, subject and object, can be seen as a desperate distancing defence against both the threat and the temptation of merger, whether the defence is mainly against an oedipal desire for an incestuous union, a pre-oedipal symbiotic desire for merger with the primary object, or an unconscious need and longing to be the object of the empathic look and adoring smile of the archaic mirroring selfobject--and presumably all of these meanings can operate simultaneously--the fact remains that the very intensity of these fusional wishes can give rise to a reactive or compensatory insistence upon boundaries, separateness, and difference. The unconscious longing to eliminate the space between the "I" and the "not-I", to close the gap between subject and object, and to transcend the self as a lack of the other, can certainly return from repression in such disguised forms as: fears of incestuous entanglements, infantile regressions, and incursion or engulfment by others; an

anxious and moralistic insistence upon the importance of boundaries and limits, a "health and maturity morality" (Kohut, 1979, p.12); in short, in the metaphysics of absence which privileges separateness, difference and lack as somehow ultimately more real than presence, connection, similarity and plenitude. In other words, adherence to the patriarchal virtues not infrequently defends against a profound unconscious longing for the mother, a desire which, I believe, following both Lacan and Kohut, is essentially a narcissistic wish to be the object of the (m)other's desire, that is, a wish for merger with the archaic mirroring selfobject.

In privileging lack as ultimately more real than plenitude; in viewing the therapeutic task as that of encouraging "the acceptance of castration"; and in subordinating the Imaginary denial of difference to the Symbolic order of distance and division; Lacan remains faithful to the patriarchal Freudian insistence upon the castration complex as a kind of psychic "bedrock" (Freud, 1937), the coming to terms with which entails a virtuous disillusionment and renunciation of unrealistic and impossible desires, a facing of reality, enabling one to achieve that degree of mental health in which, "sadder but wiser," one has succeeded in transforming "hysterical misery into common unhappiness" (Breuer & Freud, 1893-95, p. 305).

Perhaps without realizing the degree of agreement between Lacan and Freud on this score, Grunberger (1971) offers acute criticism of the Lacanian (Freudian) version of the psychoanalytic cure:

If we acknowledge ... that a person enters analysis with the unconscious hope of recovering his

narcissism ..., what are we to think of a psychoanalytic theory that, like Catholicism, is postulated on the renunciation of that restitution? As a matter of fact, the mystical investment of "acceptance of castration" takes on in the unconscious the connotation of phallic acquisition. The subject is lured into renunciation. Actually, it is a matter of satisfying a fundamental human desire by masking the theory with the defense against that very desire, which is bound to contribute markedly in its success, a mechanism that religions employ to the full, and which also constitutes the basis of masochism ... (p. 279).

Whether in the guise of achieving an acceptance of castration, or accomplishing an "instinctual renunciation" (Freud, 1930) in the face of the reality principle, one may unconsciously be displaying a phallus as a defence against a deeper sense of castration, that is, a deeper narcissistic depression that is warded off through the narcissistic gratification to be had from a view of oneself as possessing sufficient courage and realism to embrace, stoically, the "tragic sense of life." But, for Grunberger (1971), "... the neurotic is not at all a person who has not accepted castration as inherent in the 'human condition'; rather, he is a person who has failed to recover his lost narcissistic integrity ..." (p. 203).

VI. Psychopathology

Although Lacan, like Freud, clearly privileges the Symbolic over the Imaginary, the patriarchal virtues of separation over the matriarchal values of connection, he at the same time

argues that no one is so successfully oedipalized as to be completely reconciled to the Symbolic order of differences, distinctions and higher-order integrations. A part of each of us forever exists in the Imaginary. While such tendencies are clearly regressive in his eyes, Lacan recognizes that, to some extent, we all continue to yearn for the perfect merger between subject and object that Freud (1930) believed was illusorily entailed in romantic love, in mystical union or "oceanic experience," and that, to some degree, we are all prone to regressively divide or split our objects and ourselves. But rather than simply manifesting universal, normal-neurotic longings in a pathologically intensified form, so-called borderline and psychotic personalities are seen by Lacan as suffering from a more fundamental failure of oedipalization, resulting in a condition in which such symbiotic longings and splitting are relatively unmodulated and extreme. As a range of theorists working in other psychoanalytic traditions have pointed out (Laing, 1960; Guntrip, 1971), in such conditions a human relationship becomes an all or nothing affair characterized by both an intense longing for merger which can tolerate no difference, distance or separateness on the one hand and, on the other, an equally intense fear of engulfment and self-annihilation and a resulting need to retreat altogether from relationship into a schizoid aloofness.

According to Lacan (1977, ch. 6):

We will take *Verwerfung*, then, to be foreclosure of the signifier. To the point at which the Name-of-the-Father is called ... may correspond in the Other [the unconscious], then, a mere hole, which, by the inadequacy of the metaphoric effect will provoke a

corresponding hole at the place of the phallic signification (p. 201).

It is in an accident in this register and in what takes place in it, namely, the foreclosure of the Name- of- the-Father in the place of the Other, and in the failure of the paternal metaphor, that I designate the defect that gives psychosis its essential condition, and the structure that separates it from neurosis (p. 215).

Muller (1983) elucidates the Lacanian theory of psychosis (including so-called borderline phenomena) as follows:

What experience is cut short here? For Lacan (as for Freud) it appears to be the experience of castration, of the mother's apparent castration as well as one's own. In psychotic development castration is foreclosed: the child remains in a dual, symbiotic union with the mother in which the child identifies with being the all-fulfilling object of the mother's desire. For Lacan, the signifier of the mother's desire is the phallus. Thus, in attempting to be the imaginary phallus or completion of the mother the child rejects the limits implied by castration. These limits are the constraints invoked by the Law of the Father, the symbolic father who intervenes in this dual relation ... When the mother fails to affirm the Law of the Father, makes no room for the intervening role of the symbolic father, or when the real father himself has a hypocritical relation to the Law, the Name- of- the-Father as signifier is foreclosed, and therefore the symbolic castration involved in giving up the position of the phallus and becoming subject

to the Law is also foreclosed ... (p. 23).

Lacan sees the origin of the schizoid dilemma in a fundamental failure of oedipalization to establish in the unconscious the signifier of the phallus, the Name-of-the-Father, as the primal cut or castration dividing infant and mother and opening up a space for symbolization. But this theory is rendered equivocal by his positing of a literal hole in the unconscious, thereby failing to recognize this "hole" as itself a signifier, the signifier of absence or lack. As we have seen, Lacan succumbs to a metaphysical view of absence as somehow constituting an ultimate reality beneath or beyond signification. It is this metaphysical bias which prevents him from seeing that the "hole" in the unconscious results not from a failure of the primordial cut, but from its successful, but overwhelmingly traumatic, registration. Similarly, when Muller asks what is cut short here, I am inclined to respond that to cut short is nevertheless to cut. The child can only reject castration if its signification has already been encountered. The hole, gap, or lack is already the registration of castration. Far from there being a gap in the symbolic order where the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father, should be, this gap is itself the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father. In this respect, Lacan himself falls prey to the literalism that bedevils other psychoanalytic theories which posit a literal "defect" in the ego as the basis of the more severe forms of psychopathology.

On the psychotic or borderline level of regression, far from there being any "foreclosure" of the psychic gap or lack of being, it is the very traumatic, overwhelming and annihilating intensity of the inner sense of emptiness and absence that gives rise, on the one hand, to the urgent

symbiotic longings and, on the other, to equally intense fears of annihilation through engulfment by the other. Such symbiotic longings and fears arise not from a failure to register the fact of differentiation, not from any lack of an inner sense of lack, but rather from an overwhelming sense of inner absence that precludes any coming to terms with either separation or relationship through evolving a sense of separateness that does not preclude connection and of relationship that does not entail engulfment. In this situation, the sense of castration is so overwhelming that there may well be a desperate effort to defensively deny or disavow it. However, to mask or desperately attempt to fill the gap (as in the so-called restitution phase of psychosis) is nevertheless to recognize it. The psychotic or borderline personality is not fundamentally different from the neurotic or so-called normal, but simply engaged in a more extreme struggle with the universally human dilemmas of connection (Eros) on the one hand, and separation (Thanatos) on the other.

In this view, the borderline dilemma does not concern either term of the binary opposition Absence/Presence (Fort!/Da!) exclusively. Rather, it arises from a tendency to literalize or reify both terms, such that any absence becomes a devastating isolation and any presence threatens annihilation or engulfment. The problem concerns not the non-registration of either separation or connection, but rather the literal or Imaginary rather than metaphorical or Symbolic nature of their registration. In other words, when the issue of presence and absence becomes deadly serious, the Fort!/Da! game is no longer a game: for outside the symbolic or "transitional area" (Winnicott, 1971b), it becomes a matter of life and death.

VII. Conclusion

It would seem to be the case that psychoanalysts, no less than their analysands, suffer from a tendency to regress from the Symbolic to the Imaginary and to literalize or privilege one or the other pole of such binary oppositions as IMAGINARY/SYMBOLIC, COHESION/CONFLICT or INTEGRATION/CONTRADICTION that constitute the inevitable basis of psychic life. However, just as some individuals are more successful than others in the never-ending task of differentiation (overcoming the fusions) and integration (transcending the splits) which constitutes the dialectical process of personal development, in my view it is necessary in psychoanalytic theory to transcend both the metaphysical pessimism of those who cry Fort! on the one hand, as well as the metaphysical optimism of those who cry Da! on the other, in order to get on with the Fort!/Da! game of differentiation and integration, the playing of which constitutes the dialectical process of psychic development. Provided it does not become frozen into a repetitive circularity by fixation upon thesis or antithesis, such development can take the form of a spiralling process resulting in that ever-expanding and mobile synthesis which constitutes a healthy self.

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