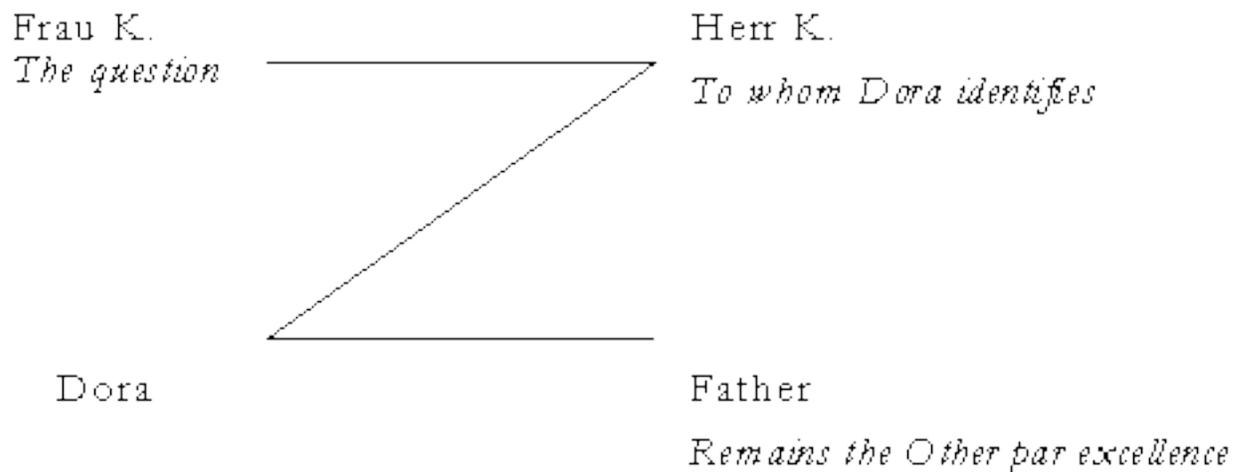


THE SCENE BY THE LAKE: WHEN DESIRE FAILS AS DEFENCE

Véronique Voruz

At the beginning of last year, the Clinical Seminar decided to focus on Dora, the case-study Freud elected to put forward as the paradigm of hysteria. The proposed objective was to desimaginarise Dora's case by stripping its logical articulations bare, and this with the aim of re-thinking hysteria today, for indeed the modifications that have taken place over the last century regarding the configuration of familial and social structures have had a crucial impact on the question of femininity. The link between femininity and hysteria being well established in analytic practice, it seemed logical to see whether Freud's case could still be of any use beyond its seminal status and provide us with an orientation regarding today's often more diffuse symptoms. We thus decided to study the case of Dora with close scrutiny in order to see whether we could identify the real of a structure subtending the otherwise seemingly irrational phenomenology of a whimsical hysteric. In other words, if one could use Freud's case for the purpose of locating the specific mode of response of the real to castration at play in hysteria, it would then be possible to extract the invariants of a clinical structure from her case and use it in our approach to a feminine clinic.

It was thus with the aim of delineating the co-ordinates of hysteria that we, in turn, took up the task of exposing the frame of Dora's symptom, a frame concealed by a number of identifications. In brief, for this has been previously explored, let us recall that in *Seminar IV*, Lacan maps Dora's identifications onto schema L. Following this schema, her position is defined through the tension supporting her identifications: Herr K. and Dora are on the imaginary axis, that of the ego, and Frau K. and Dora's father occupy the symbolic one, that of desire.



Schema L, Seminar IV, p. 143

Dora's behaviour can only be understood in the light of this 'quartered' position. With this in mind, we can now approach the pivotal point of the case, Herr K.'s proposal by the lake, for it is at this point that Dora's attitude undergoes a radical change, a change which points to a modification in the organisation of her identifications, since the pattern mapped onto Schema L is what supported Dora's love scenario until then.

Cutting through the efflorescence of mundane details, Lacan's sustained engagement with the case demonstrates that Dora used these *identifications* in order to block the *anguish* provoked by the absence of a signifier for the woman in the unconscious. Lacan indicates that her position was largely animated by a will to secure unconditional love, love as the impossible gift, for it famously involves 'giving what one does not have' (*Seminars III and IV*). It is also clear that Dora engaged upon her quest for love under the *cover* of her identification with her father's object of desire, Frau K. It is when she is confronted with the real of a sexual demand that she is brought back to her own *jouissance*, which was until then comfortably channelled by the dynamics of her identifications, for when Herr K. makes his ill-fated proposal, she is brutally exposed: Dora herself is now desired, not the other woman she shelters behind. The question of her own femininity can no longer be deferred, and anguish ensues. Thus the focal point of this paper, its vanishing point, as one could say somewhat facetiously, is this moment by the lake when all her constructions are revealed to be precisely that, mere constructions designed to provide a propitious background for her personal fictions, and she is threatened with her disappearance as subject.

In this paper then, I will elaborate upon my two immediate reactions to this scene: firstly, that the scene by the lake had to do with anguish, and secondly, that this anguish came about following a crucial modification for Dora concerning her identifications.

The Event

The case itself is well known and I will not retrace the somewhat complicated bonds uniting the four people who are of concern to us when thinking of Dora. Instead, I will focus on what interests me here, in other words the moment where something comes undone for her. Arguably, it is this moment which provides us with a plausible key to Dora's symptom. This is what happens: at the age of 16, Dora is left alone by a lake with Herr K., who begins a proposal which includes the words translated by Strachey as 'I get nothing from my wife'. At this point, Dora slaps him and leaves. It is from this moment onwards that she becomes adamant that all relations with the Ks should stop. We clearly have the triggering factor of Dora's rebellion and resentment against her father, a resentment which leads him to seek Freud's help.

Theoretical Elements: Working Towards an Understanding of the Scene by the Lake

This is our starting hypothesis: when Herr K. declares his passionate affection there ensues a fall of identification for Dora, which gives rise to a subsequent anguish. This anguish is 'dealt with' through a passage to the act, followed by a regression to the stage of a demand for pure love addressed to her father, *a demand no longer mediated by the metonymy of desire*.

Our question is thus two-fold: firstly, why does Herr K.'s declaration provoke this fall of identification? And secondly, what is the mechanism of anguish? But first, let us return to our starting elements.

1) *The fall of identification:*

It is clear from Freud's account of the scene that Dora is very upset by Herr K.'s statement, an alternative translation for which is 'on the side of my wife, there is nothing': *Ich habe nichts an meiner Frau*. This possible translation is pointed out by Lacan (Sem. IV, p. 143). Schematically, on the basis of Lacan's elaborations at this stage of his teaching, we may conclude that Dora could only sustain herself as subject by identifying with Frau K, who is the object of desire for both her father and Herr K., and that she thus could not bear to see this woman debased. Or, in a slightly different perspective, we could say that

Frau K., at this point, no longer shields Dora from the real of sexuality and that Dora is thus awakened from her fantasmatic slumber. For now, let us simply note that Dora's position with regard to her central identification is deeply shaken.

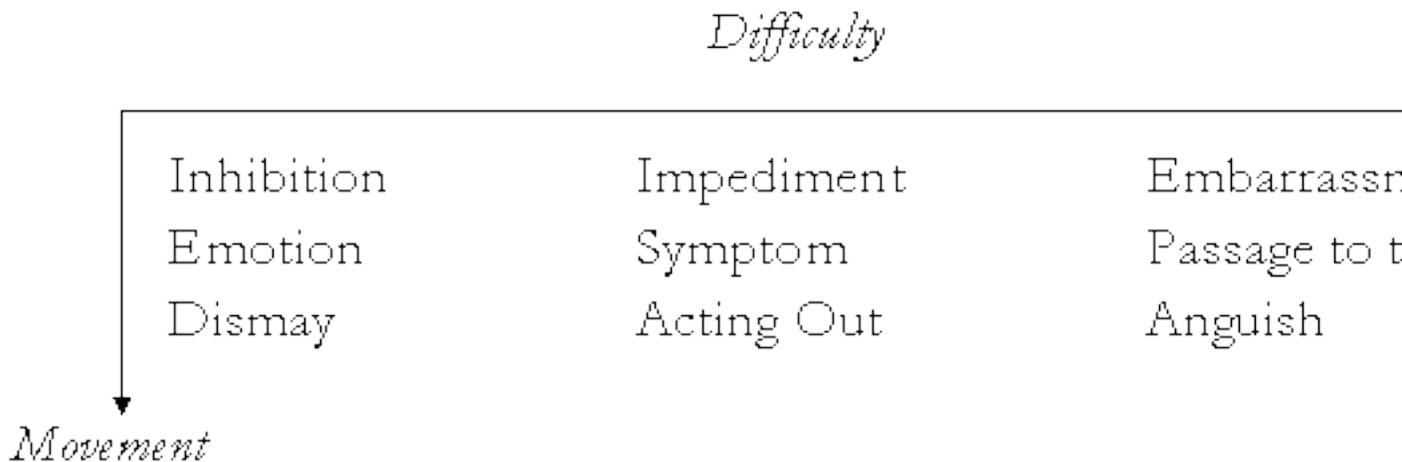
2) The regression to the stage of demand

This second assertion stems from a phenomenological observation of the change occurring in Dora's attitude with regard to her father's love affair with Frau K. Before the scene, she was tolerating and even enjoying it, as she could find a position for herself in their relation by deluding herself that she was essential to their love. Afterwards, Dora demands that the relation stops and that the absolute love of her father be exclusively addressed to her. Here we can recall Lacan's comment in *Seminar V* (p. 369) regarding hysterical identification: when the father is simply the addressee of the demand for love, then the hysterical subject is identified with the father. We can thus imagine that following the scene by the lake, Dora reverts to an identification with her father, short-circuiting a desire which only came into the equation through the mediating function of the other woman. Dora then starts to behave as if her father had wronged her, and requires reparation, giving us a perfect example of feminine *ressentiment*.

3) The subsequent anguish resolved through the passage to the act

In *Seminar X*, Lacan postulates that Dora's slap is a passage to the act: in the sessions of 16 and 23 January 1963, he opposes *acting out* and *passage to the act*, relying on two Freudian cases, that of the young homosexual woman and that of Dora. Lacan defines acting out as the *monstration of an object*, and passage to the act as an attempt to restore the subject who *has been barred by the presence of an object*. Dora's passage to the act is less dramatic than the young homosexual's, no doubt, but it participates of the same mechanism, a mechanism which is elucidated in the course of the seminar.

Previously, in the first session of the same seminar, Lacan had introduced the following table in order to organise Freud's text *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. In this table, he situates passage to the act as the last resort of the subject against anguish:



Seminar X, 14 November 1962

The link between anguish and passage to the act is clearly established by Lacan. If we are to concentrate on the event which concerns us here, it is the third column which interests us, and it may be understood as such: when *embarrassed* by the presence of an object, the subject is *barred*. Lacan remarks that embarrassment resonates with bar.

In the session of 9 January 1963, he gives us another very important clue to understand anguish: contrary to Freud's claim that anguish is without an object, he says that anguish is not without having an object, or, in French, *l'angoisse n'est pas sans objet*. This ambiguous formulation immediately indicates that anguish has to do with a drive-object, as indeed if it was any other object, Lacan would not say that anguish is *not without having* an object. It is only the specific status of object *a* that allows for such a formulation - bearing in mind that it is the fantasy that transforms a drive-object into an object of desire. Thus, if we are to combine Lacan's table and his statement as to the object of anguish, we may postulate that where there is a passage to the act, it comes as a result of an encounter with a drive-object, an encounter not filtered by desire - in other words, clothed in the imaginary scenario of the fantasy - and therefore causing anguish, the anguish of vanishing in the face of the certainty of the *jouissance* attributed to the Other.

I hope to have demonstrated the well-founded nature of the elements I started my reflection from. I shall list them again as they are my working hypothesis: Herr K.'s declaration produces a fall of identification in Dora, resulting in an upsurge of anguish. She resolves this anguish by slapping Herr K., the passage to the act, regresses to an anterior identification with her father, and subsequently demands absolute love. From this hypothesis, we can now try to work out what happened to Dora at this moment, beginning with the question of the fall of identification.

Demand and Desire

In Chapter XX of *Seminar V, The Formations of the Unconscious*, the seminar in which Lacan constructs his graph of desire, we find a thorough elaboration of the relation between demand and desire. It is in this chapter that Lacan argues that it is in so far as Dora can *desire beyond demand* that she is content with her position in her father's affair. Indeed, she does not identify with her father but with her father's object of desire. (This can be seen to prefigure Lacan's later concept of *père-version*). Let us retrace the argument. Lacan states that in neurosis the ego-Ideal - the identification noted I(A) on the graph - is produced after the double crossing of the line of the Other: $s(A) - A$. He then moves on to situate Dora's central identification on the graph of desire, saying that such is also the case for her, but he adds that in her case, and for all hysterics, the second line ($\$ \diamond a - d$) represents the *desire of the father*, and that for Dora, it is after *the double crossing of those two lines* that her identification is constituted. The logical consequence of this assertion is that the ideal identification of the hysteric is precipitated *in the place of the fantasy*, a fantasy that bears the mark of the desire of the father (p. 368).

Thus the hysteric identifies with the object of desire of the Other of love, and hence is stuck in the position of the object, a position through which she can obtain a sense of being *since it is the support of her central identification* - but at the price of a drastic alienation. In other words, Dora's identification with her father is not an imaginary identification but an identification with his desire. This is why we can say that Dora's object of desire is Frau K., in as much as she desires what is beyond demand. But what she truly needs to be able to desire is to be the object of desire of the Other of love - classically the father - , and not the object of his demand. Dora's situation is 'ideal' in a sense, for her father is impotent. She can delude herself into believing that his attachment for Frau K. is sustained by a pure desire beyond demand and sexual satisfaction. She thus identifies with this woman, object of pure desire of her father, and she

does so by identifying with Herr K., not just anybody but a man who, in her mind, also desires this object of pure desire, his wife. By identifying with Herr K., at the level of the imaginary, she can also desire Frau K. while also seeing herself as being desired in the same way that Frau K. is by her father. When Herr K. makes his hapless declaration, he annihilates the dimension of desire for Dora, who is thus returned to the status of sexual object for Herr K., assimilated to the previous object of his sexual favours, the dismissed governess (hence the importance of 15 for her, the notice period of the governess being a fortnight). This also implies that her father is treating her as an object of exchange, an offering of sorts to the cheated husband. She is no longer a special, precious object of love and pure desire, but merely a woman amongst others, equal to others, and thus *in the field of sexuality*.

More theoretically, if she cannot sustain herself in the position of the Ideal, what does that mean? Is the Ideal for a woman equivalent to being the object of the paternal fantasy? And why is her reaction anguish, not anger or fear? On this latter point, I will venture a hypothesis: the forced re-introduction of sexuality in Dora's life undermines her fantasy, through which she enjoys on the side of privation. The irruption of something real, no longer veiled by the Ideal, shatters her fantasy, and *the fantasy is the support of desire*, as Lacan tells us in *Seminar X* (16 January 1963). If the fantasy collapses, so does desire. When desire collapses, the object becomes present, the object of the Other's demand, which indicates the certainty of *jouissance*. And we can start to see more clearly now that desire is a defence against *jouissance*, in that it introduces a significant distance between the subject and the object. Desire and anguish occupy positions of eclipse in relation to each other: when desire is present, anguish is not, and conversely. Thus, the disappearance of the possibility of desire for Dora gives rise to anguish. This is what the fall of identification renders apparent in the scene by the lake.

To clarify, let me summarise the argument: before the scene by the lake, Dora is supported by a successful ideal identification sustained by positioning herself as the object of desire of her father. At the level of the fantasy, she can thus see herself as a loved object beyond demand, and can thus sustain her own desire, even if only as unsatisfied. With the disappearance of desire, she becomes the object of the Other's *jouissance*, and disappears as subject. By slapping Herr K, she regains some sense of subjectivity, although it is one that is deprived of the metonymical dimension of desire and indexed on a stagnating demand for love.

Anguish and Desire: Approaching Jouissance

Now that we have gone through this hypothetical account of what caused Dora's anguish, let us broach the second aspect of my question: what is the mechanism of anguish? It is clear, from what we have elaborated so far, that since desire is what keeps anguish at bay, and since fantasy is the support of desire, then the fall of identification must have had a clear impact on Dora's fantasy. Her failure to incarnate the Other's object of desire shatters her fantasy, and anguish comes on the scene.

What is the function of anguish? We know that despite his somewhat fluctuating views as to the economic nature of anxiety - Strachey's translation of the German *Angst* - Freud consistently saw it as a signal, indicating that some new psychical action needed to be carried out in order to restore homeostasis. Lacan did not depart from this view. We also know that Freud associated the feeling of anxiety in women to the loss of the object's love (*Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*). It seems that, in Dora's case, it is losing the love obtained by means of the fantasy that allows for the return of the object which generates her anguish, the dual function of the object being stressed by Lacan.

1) Anguish and the object

In *Seminars IX* and *X* Lacan uses the parable of the praying mantis to illustrate the functioning of anguish. The parable is the following: when you see a praying mantis, and you don't know whether you are wearing a male or a female mask, anguish sets in because you *don't know* what fate is to be expected from the praying mantis. Thus we can understand why it is possible to say that the enigma of the desire of the Other gives rise to anguish, and we can also understand why the neurotic is constantly constructing the demand of the Other: to *eradicate the dimension of uncertainty as to the Other's jouissance*.

Initially, I experienced some difficulty in reconciling this first aspect of the parable, with its emphasis on the enigmatic Other, with Lacan's insistence that anguish is *not without an object*. However, upon reflection it became clear to me that Lacan's parable concerns the vacillation of the neurotic before the certainty of his relation to *jouissance*. Thus the parable could also be understood as follows: if I know for a fact that I am wearing the male mask, then anguish is at its worse because then I am *certain* that I am the *object* of the Other's *jouissance*. This certainty annihilates me as subject, for it does away with the dimension of desire, and it is desire which defers *jouissance*, that which the neurotic cannot bear. Indeed, as Lacan tells us in *Seminar X*, the neurotic *refuses to sacrifice his castration to the jouissance of the Other*. This refusal leads the neurotic to construct the other through his fantasy, itself designed to desire despite alienation in the Other (hence the correspondence between fantasy and the operation of separation). In passing, this casts some light on why the only satisfactory end of analysis should involve the exposure of the inexistence of the Other, in other words, the exposure of the fact that the *jouissance* one fears and one defends oneself against at great expense is attributed to an Other which is in fact tirelessly constructed by the subject himself. Having exposed the Other as fiction, one can then begin to address the question of the superego, that 'little bit of the real' that can no longer be displaced onto the Other. Equally, it helps us to understand why a traversal of the fantasy may be necessary in order to reduce the superegoic effects experienced by the subject.

Meanwhile, as long as the subject is still lured on by the charms of symptomatic truth, his/her only option is to keep his/her desire as either impossible or unsatisfied, for satisfaction would annihilate the effect of separation achieved through the fantasy. This leads me to my next section, broaching the question of desire in hysteria.

2) Unsatisfied desire

Desire thus is what keeps the identification with the object of the Other's *jouissance* at a reasonable distance through the mediation of love achieved by means of the fantasy. The price to pay for this distance however is the impossibility of satisfying one's desire. And indeed, in analysing the dream of the Butcher's wife, Freud discovers that the hysteric's desire is for an unsatisfied desire, that there is thus a desire for *privation* in hysteria. One can therefore argue that the 'enjoyment' derived from privation is the substitutive mode of satisfaction of the hysteric.

The hysteric sustains her desire as unsatisfied by taking an interest in the desire of the Other. The Butcher's wife is interested in the enigmatic desire of her husband for her thin friend, when he usually likes voluptuous women. She is not interested in what *satisfies* him, but in what he *desires*. This clearly indicates that the hysteric is interested in the Other's lack. Why? Because her question concerns her *being* as subject, a being she obtains through the Other. This is where Lacan provides us with an answer as to what the hysteric's desire is: it is to be the *signifier of the Other's desire* - the phallus (Φ), *not the object of his satisfaction*. This explains why 'being the phallus' is a possible feminine position.

If we recall Dora's 'quartered' position on Schema L, we can understand it in the light of how she constructs and sustains her desire. Firstly, at the level of the ego, she identifies with an *imaginary* other,

an identification which provides her with a support for her investigation of the desire of the Other. Secondly, she desires what the Other of love desires, for she can only desire through an identification with a desiring position. It allows her to explore what is it that a woman wants. Thirdly, at the level of being, she identifies with the object of desire of the Other, a position termed *being the phallus* by Lacan. This provides her with an answer to the question of what it is that a man wants from a woman.

3) Passage to the act as resolution

When the hysteric fails to sustain herself as desirable, she can no longer desire. She is then faced with the certainty of being the object of the Other's satisfaction, a certainty which manifests itself by a kind of paralysis (here we can recall the two axes of Lacan's table: movement — difficulty). How does Dora's slap constitute a resolution of the trauma of being effaced as subject? In *Seminar X* (19 December 1963), Lacan tells us that what is at stake for the subject 'is to avoid what, in anguish, is sustained by a terrible certainty', and adds that 'to act is to tear certainty away from anguish'. Further, he also says that 'it may precisely be from anguish that action borrows its certainty.'

These quotes illustrate how a passage to the act, in so far as it is an act, takes away the certainty that fuels anguish while transforming it into the certainty that informs the act: thus, when Dora slaps Herr K., she alleviates her anguish (this is not to say that a passage to the act is the only possible act in the face of anguish) and re-constitutes herself as subject through the certainty of action. Most passages to the act however, as they aim at getting rid of the object with which the subject is identified, end up in more dramatic circumstances, suicide being the most frequent occurrence.

Now that it is possible to grasp some of the motives underlying Dora's attitude, I will concentrate on two broader points regarding hysterical strategies in general. These struck me in the course of my work on Dora: first, the prevalence of privation as mode of feminine *jouissance*, secondly, the tight bond attaching the hysteric's fate to that of the master, whom she constantly challenges but cannot do without

Privation as Mode of Jouissance

In *Seminar XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse*, Lacan returns once more to Dora, this time to talk about the *truth* of the hysteric. Lacan's angle on truth touches more directly on the question of *jouissance*, for truth is a symptomatic production the function of which is to consolidate the subject's *belief* in his symptom *qua* signified of the Other, and thus designed to preserve the enjoyment one derives from one's castration.

What is the hysteric's truth, a truth that draws her always further into the entangled webs of her fantasmatic interpretations and re-interpretations of the Other's desire? From our earlier developments, it is clear that the hysteric obtains some sense of her own being by being what the Other lacks; she strives to be at the same time the object of the Other's *desire* and the *signifier* of his lack. Hence the logic of the hysteric who slips away as object, a logic noted by Lacan in his '*Ecrit: Subversion of the subject*'. She wants to be the phallus, the signifier of desire, not the object of satisfaction of this desire. It is always a close call for her to be able to incarnate the object of desire, then get out of delivering the promised satisfaction, and yet manage to retain the master's desire.

At the level of being, as the hysteric can only exist if the Other is lacking, she will concentrate her efforts towards exposing the Other/master as castrated. This is her truth: *the castration of the master*. To expose this lack in the Other, the hysteric will give up on her own *jouissance*, this is why it is possible to

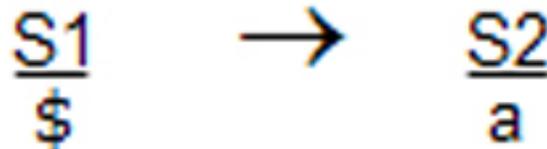
say that desire for privation is the condition of the hysteric's desire. Here we may have another angle on the scene by the lake. Herr K. is for Dora someone that can bring satisfaction to her sexual desire, he is what has been called *aquart terme phallique*, a bearer of the organ. But Lacan indicates that desire for privation is what interests Dora in Herr K., thus the fact that he has the means to satisfy her sexually is important, but only in so far as another woman *deprives* her of it. Lacan derives this interpretation from Dora's first dream, that of the jewel case: what interests her is not the jewel, but the case. This is what she *enjoys*, says Lacan (*Seminar XVII*, p. 109).

Dora's second dream, the one about the death of her father, is also a dream that has to do with emptiness: it takes place mostly in a deserted flat, in which she finds a substitute for her father, a big book. This dream reveals another aspect of her truth: what she wants from him is the knowledge that he can produce, a knowledge on the sexual relation - Dora used to read the Encyclopaedia to find out about sex -, and this is why she supports him against all odds.

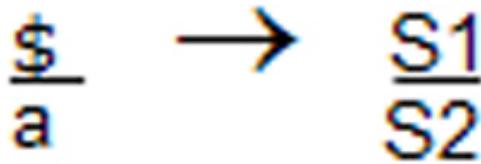
The truth of the hysteric is thus two-fold: on the one hand, the castration of the idealised father, which reveals the secret of the master, and, on the other, privation, that is the acceptance by the subject of the substitutive satisfaction of being deprived. With this in mind, we can try to understand the logic behind the discourse of the hysteric.

The Hysteric's Discourse

The formula of the hysteric's discourse is well known, it illustrates that the hysteric speaks from the place of her division in order to make the master produce a knowledge about the sexual relation.



We know that, for Lacan, a discourse is a form of social bond. In *Seminar XVIII*, he also tells us that the discourse of the master is the discourse of the unconscious. We can understand such a statement in so far as the unconscious is structured like a language, according to the elementary signifiers of kinship. It aims at saying what is, or, as Lacan says in *Seminar XX*, *le discours du maître c'est le discours du m'êtré* (p. 33). It is in that sense that the S2 is the slave signifier of the S1 in the discourse of the master: knowledge is put to work in order to sustain the master-signifiers in their position.



The discourse of the hysteric, on the other hand, interrogates the repressed or, in other words, the unconscious constituted of master-signifiers. The split subject of the unconscious interrogates the master-signifiers and reveals the castration of the master, i.e. that *mastery over the body only obtains through a renunciation of jouissance*. And indeed in the discourse of the master, the *plus-de-jouir* is on the side of the slave.

In *Seminar XVII*, Lacan says that the hysteric reveals the truth of the master, i.e. the impotence of man to animate his knowledge with a *plus-de-jouir*. But the problem of the hysteric is also one of impotence, for what is repressed in hysteria returns in the body or in the Other. This is why the hysteric addresses the Other to get knowledge. This is also why she is dissociated from knowledge and cannot invest it with *jouissance*: in the discourse of the hysteric the *plus-de-jouir* is on the side of the repressed truth. This may be why her *jouissance* is on the side of privation.

But, as opposed to the master, the hysteric refuses to be the slave of the master-signifier. She refuses to become one through the signifier, she refuses to make herself its body, *de s'en faire le corps*, as the master does. The master acquires mastery over his body through the signifier, the hysteric refuses this one-fying power of the master-signifier. This may be why she is so dependant on her identifications, for she places her being in the Other. In a sense though, the hysteric reveals a truth that goes for all subjects, i.e. *that the subject only exists as masked, as the subject is not where it is represented, and conversely*.

Conclusion

I hope that these various elaborations on hysteria will cast some light on Lacan's later work, where the questions of femininity and love are prevalent and where Lacan formalises the idea of the *pas-toute* as that which of the real is irreducible to the phallic order. Femininity, the Other *jouissance*, are presented as that which goes beyond the dimension of the one-fying signifier. Jacques-Alain Miller clearly signposts the necessity to think the real in connection with the question of femininity in his paper *On Semblants*, when he says that woman is closer to the real than man, and that it is men who are in the position of semblants. He defines a semblant as that which veils the nothing and thereby creates it as absent. Knowing that the phallus is a semblant, this may start to make sense.

In his paper, Miller concludes his elaboration on the feminine semblants of *having* and *being* by opposing phallic *jouissance* - the *jouissance* of the owner - to the without-limit of the feminine. This seems to point us in the direction of the central debate currently surrounding the end of analysis and the pass, for where a 'masculine' solution seems to involve an identification with the symptom - a solution favoured by Lacan in his *Seminar XXIV* - and thus, in the last analysis, with a meaningless inscription of *jouissance*, a 'feminine' solution seems to imply a different relation to lack, an acceptance of the absence of unification, or *one-ification*, under the auspices of the signifier. This certainly leaves us with a lot to think about in terms of the real at the end

of analysis and the position of the analyst. Are we simply talking about the persistence of one's elected mode of enjoyment, i.e. is the feminine predilection for a desire that finds its source in $S(A)$ simply a consequence of a mode of *jouissance* on the side of privation?

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