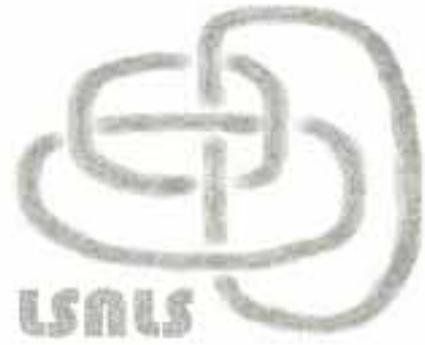


## From Psychoanalytical Notebooks 6, 2001: Representation and Perception



### 'Nothing is guaranteed'

Philippe Carpentier

*"One cannot help thinking that there is a dimension of the analytical experience, including the end of analysis, which puts the subject in the formative axis of this third moment".*

This third moment is that of the Oedipus, when the ego ideal is established, and the complex, rounded off, declines. In 1998 in Barcelona, in his reading of Lacan's Seminar *The Formations of the Unconscious*, J.-A. Miller focuses on this third moment as innovative.

In this third moment Lacan establishes the function of the father as name. In the second moment, the father intervenes as depriver and pulls apart the child's position as the mother's metonymic object. In the following moment Lacan deepens his work on the mechanisms of language and particularly of the *Witz*, considering a father, committed to a politics of the *Witz*, who allows and authorises the subject's own inventiveness, welcoming new signifiers. Lacan constructs an Oedipal temporality that the logic of the graph of desire finalises following the example of Freud in his text on the decline of the Oedipus, taking his bearings on what happens in the case of the boy. He emphasises that the realisation of this third moment gives the child all the rights to be a man.<sup>1</sup> He brings us the clinically precious remark that in puberty he could later be challenged on something which has to be related to something not completely identified with the image of the father.<sup>2</sup>

For the girl the end of the Oedipus appears different and, as it were, less complex. Concerning the phallus, "she knows where it is, where she has to go to get it, from the father, she takes up with the one who has it".<sup>3</sup>

Finally, he makes an apparently enigmatic remark which is clarified by the discussion of a case that "True women are always a little wild".<sup>4</sup>

*How can a man love a woman when she is a mother?*

Isabelle is a young woman of 17. I have been seeing her for over a year following a demand encouraged by one of her closest girlfriends worried about her sadness. A brilliant high school student, for the last few months she has dropped behind in her school work. The decline in her marks occurs at the same time as a bulimia rounded off with vomiting that she provokes. Isabelle is disgusted with herself and does not want to know anything about it. If her father is in the know of what is happening with her, her mother does not know that she has consulted an analyst.

Recognised at birth by a father for whom she is the only daughter, failure nevertheless colours her entry into the world. The father divorced his wife, then a little later separated from his mistress, Isabelle's mother. Her parents are originally from Reunion, but disunion, index of the non-rapport, marks the beginning of her history. She has been living ever since with her mother and step-father, parents of three boys. The first boy born when she was still a little girl was looked after by Isabelle. "I could do what I

wanted, she explained to me, it was like a doll.” As for the two others, they saw the light of day, one just before she began her sixth year in school, the other when she began high school.

The little Isabelle had grand day dreams in which she alone saved the world from its misery. She never stopped asking questions, unceasing ‘whys’ without answers, leaving her unsatisfied in the face of life and its meaning. She is considering a career in biological medicine. She will be a researcher, exploring the secrets of the organism in a domain which is characterised by owing nothing to maternal knowledge.

‘Since always’, Isabelle is worried about her image that she works to preserve. Her sixth year at school corresponds to the first bodily changes accepted with discomfort for ‘being in the same body as her mother’. During her school years she alternated between bulimic behaviour and dieting. She is trying to master her emerging forms which she masks under ample clothing.

She complains about her mother who, she says, does not listen nor speak to her. Violent conflicts, close to physical confrontation separate them. She tries to back off from her mother’s whereabouts, and severely limits her trust in her for fear of being hurt by her. In the equivocal formula “I have the interests of my mother in mind more than anyone else’s”, the suspicion dominates a hateful, malevolent reverse side, ready for a primordial susceptible partner to be reintegrated as object of *jouissance*. For Isabelle the couple formed by the mother and step father is enigmatic. Far from idealising it, Isabelle questions the attachment of this man to her mother in the question “How can a man love a woman when she is a mother?” The couple or rather the couples established by the father crystallise Isabelle’s interest. Behind her mother’s back she is in love with a father who makes his daughter his confidante of a tormented love life.

#### *A crucial moment*

Isabelle is in the second year of high school. The diet that she has undertaken puts her in conformity with the idealised image. From then on she encounters the interest of boys whom she straightaway busies herself with deceiving, just as much as deceit and jealousy contaminate her relations to girlfriends. It’s also the moment which gives birth to her father’s unfaithfulness the hint of which she picks up in telephone calls with her father. During holidays spent with the latter in Reunion, she observes the reality of his deceit. It took her some time to provide me with the details. Back from her holiday, anguish appears in the sessions which measures the proximity of the real. “There is a discrepancy between my body and my mind..., my mind is in Reunion”. She notes that in Reunion, she was already examining herself, evaluating what there was that was good and less good in her, but also the look of others had changed. What she discovers is, in her terms, ‘what there is behind the image’, hers as much as the one she makes of others. “I no longer see the others as before, there was what they looked like, and, then, beyond that, emptiness..., it was as if I was above them, knew their thoughts, I was hard on them.”

When withdrawn into a state of sadness, her girlfriends tell her that she has everything, to which she replies that “inside her there is nothing”. There were Isabelle thinks that the harmony of a narcissistic love would be an offer, a *jouissance* is erupting by way of left-over, that is the gaze and its effects of division that are creeping out, the object (*a*) which organises the sexual relation which does not exist.

This traumatic moment, moment of division, what she subjectifies like the crossing of a frontier, puts her ‘up against something other which is not me’.

She replies to it, as the symptomatic solution, by accepting the label of bulimia, by dressing in a way that does not arouse the interest of boys, their desire, and by covering a body left uncared for. Bulimia is an attempt to keep at a distance the desire of

## 'Nothing is Guaranteed'

the Other as well as her own desire which is stronger than her and which clings to the body which she wants to believe is reducible to the image. Isabelle doesn't lose her way as much as she just stands to the side, protecting herself from the future of which she has caught a glimpse as a defect in an agreement between the sexes. To the harshness of a position which places her above the others, giving her a glimpse of a lack in the Other, she prefers the shelter of a dominance of the Other which she gives to it in fantasy, and from where she can cultivate her impossible loves whilst preserving for herself a solitary *jouissance*, namely the bulimia that she describes as a "pleasure that I give myself all alone without being disturbed or seen". If it wasn't in any case the emergence of a gaze associated with shame which leads her to make herself vomit, precisely to be vomited when it's not a 'I make myself vomit' which brings into play an all-seeing mother. For Isabelle, in an impasse in regard to her desire, "the solution for filling in the emptiness is not to do well in order to do better".

### *'Nothing is guaranteed'*

The encounter with the desire of the Other and therefore with her own desire, that harshness, towards the humanitarian dreams of her childhood, is correlative with a confrontation with the version of the father. The moment in which she comes in the place of object cause of desire is also the moment in which she perceives, realises, the moment of a look, the solution by fantasy regarding her father who puts very young women in place of objects. Objects of love but beyond this, standardised objects, interchangeable and expendable. What marks the horizon of the real in play is letting one object drop for another quite distant from any exception.

From the encounter, Isabelle deduces a formula which, for belonging to current discourse, doesn't make it any newer in her acts of saying. What most assuredly comes to her is that 'nothing is guaranteed'. There is something new in her saying which is the hole dug out by the real of *jouissance* in the 'there is' of Oedipal love for the father. 'There is nothing guaranteed' is a declination of 'there isn't'. The encounter with the real strikes being it to the detriment of having it, strikes at the subject's narcissism. The crumbling away of having it produces the emergence, let's say more surely, the amplification of the field of the Other of the object gaze.

Her 'nothing is guaranteed' implicates the father's inconsistency when his own particular mode of *jouissance* appears. Isabelle discovers that 'there is no great person', or, at least, her father is not one. I will not take up François Leguil's recent well argued work on the well know passage in the *Discours de clôture*, given by Jacques Lacan in 1967, in which a reference to that business of the grand person.

In *Seminar V* Lacan discusses the elements which put into perspective what a grand person is. He remarks in 1958 that analyses of the Oedipus complex stop at the stage of a depriving father. Then, more specifically, "one thought that all the ravages of this complex depended on the omnipotence of the father".<sup>5</sup> Lacan takes up the question of ravage, of who its actors are. Again, he specifies: "One did not think that in this second moment, apart from the fact that one did not emphasise that castration in play there had to do with privation of the mother and not of the child".<sup>6</sup>

Far from the myth of 'a harmony within the maternal environment' (*Discours de clôture des journées sur les psychoses chez l'enfant*, 1968), that Lacan did not cease declaiming against,<sup>7</sup> it's the mode of *jouissance* of the parental couple that he put at the centre of the Oedipal process.

Beyond a father who says no, support of the law, Lacan brings out the condition of the decline of Oedipal love against the background of the father's yes, of a father who says yes.

“The third moment is this — the father can give to the mother what she desires, and can give it to her because he has it. The fact of potency intervenes here in the genital sense of the word — let’s say that the father is a potent father. The mother’s relation to the father thereby reaches the level of the real”.<sup>8</sup> In this way Lacan promises beyond privation a father who gives and opens the world of exchange. The condition that brings about the decline for the girl is to take, where it is, the phallus, on condition it is there. Beyond the symbolic value of the father as name, what a father is gets its coordinates from the relation that the father has with *jouissance*. The father of the third moment of the Oedipus is a perspective on the grand person.

*To get lost in the world*

“You are a little girl and you want to stay one,” I relied in these terms to the project she whipped up during the sixth form, not without the blind complicity of her parents, to delay her entry into medical school, doing instead a preparatory year in high school protected from the sound and fury of the world.

The following session she brought a construction worthy of interpretative work. The change, that she always located until now in her entry into her sixth year, she now refers to a specific episode which dates from her second year at school. Her mother made known to her the decision taken by one of the father’s women companions to take contraception in order not to remain single with a child. This knowledge malevolent, in any case, on the part of the mother towards the father aroused horror in Isabelle.

Isabelle connects this memory to the ‘anorexic’ episode in high school, along with a detail, until then omitted, of amenorrhea lasting 6 months which ‘didn’t bother her in the least’. She reveals the secret of her ‘regime’, to be like her father’s partners. For Isabelle to become thin is to get rid of something, ‘of my weight’, she says. She specifies: “It’s not the weight as usually understood, but something inside me, a weight in me, which is at the same time on the outside.” To the misdemeanour of narcissistic identity its reverse replies, the object(a), extimate point to the subject.

The father has no capacity to make a woman who has become a mother the cause of his desire. In Isabelle’s translation ‘he doesn’t know what he wants’, which refers to elements in her own history, the father’s abandonment of the mother and child. In this way she is the symptom of the parental couple, of its disunion, whilst trying to hold onto the father’s love, smuggled from the mother.

In Reunion she saw her father deceive his companion with one of his employees, what her mother was in the past in her father’s business. For Isabelle ‘the eternalisation of Oedipal love’, as Laure Naveau formulates it beautifully in an article dedicated to adolescence, passes by the rejection of a part of her femininity. This is the weight she is trying to get rid of from her adolescence.

Let’s end on an optimistic note, an optimism which runs through Lacan’s *Seminar V*, on which Jacques-Alain Miller remarks. Regarding the interpretation that she makes of her position, Isabelle formulates a project: “I mustn’t stay like this.” Meaning she must not remain a little girl and aim at growing up.

If J.-A. Miller accents the optimism of this seminar, it’s to make sharper the later emphasis in the teaching of Lacan ‘on the repetition of an experience of a primordial *jouissance*’,<sup>9</sup> reducing the liberating part of the signifier which connotes what doesn’t exist and which broadens the experience. This remark converges with what M.-H. Brousse recently brought out, noting that with respect to the ravage in the mother-daughter relation, the force of the father’s yes sometimes carries little weight.

Isabelle has to insert herself, in the perspective of our *journée*, into the formative axis of the third moment of the Oedipus from which one has a glimpse at the horizon of the real.

## 'Nothing is Guaranteed'

Translated by Richard Klein

1. J.-A. Miller, *Du Nouveau* in *Collection rue Husmans*, p. 39.
2. J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire V: Les Formation de l'unconscient*, 1957-58, Seuil, Paris, p. 195.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 271-2: *The daughter and the phallus*, where the position of Klein is discussed.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
9. J.-A. Miller, *op. cit.* p.59.

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