

## PHOBIA AS A TURNTABLE

Bernardino Horne

Whoever wishes to inform him or herself about the phobic symptom has access to a voluminous bibliography, to fundamental texts, from the case of Little Hans<sup>1</sup> to those of Lacan, especially in his Seminar on object-relations,<sup>2</sup> and to the work of Jacques-Alain Miller on this Seminar.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, readers, amongst whom I count myself, will not find much that clarifies Lacan's proposition that phobia is a turntable which opens onto hysteria and obsessional neurosis and can establish a link with perverse structure. That is why I shall centre my account on this point<sup>4</sup> by asking myself if phobia as a turntable includes a phase in which there is an effectuation of the structure, given that the subject provisionally resolves castration-anxiety to which he is initially confronted by linking it to the signifier.

### ***The phobic symptom***

Lacan says that the phobic symptom is constituted at the point of the division of the subject. This point is a knot, against which the subject will defend itself with the phobia and where the fetish will be erected, or where the not-hesitation of neurosis will take root.<sup>5</sup>

Lacan takes a case of Helen Deutsch as example, a child suffering from a phobia of hens. He summarises the case, saying that at the beginning the child experienced a sharp pleasure in accompanying his mother to the hen-house to collect the eggs and played, when he took his bath with his mother, at being the hen who gave her eggs. One cannot help but see that the child's *jouissance* was to be the object of its mother's attention and to provide her with this object. Lacan defines this relation as anaclitic. (We can allow ourselves to play with the idea that if the child had done the pass, the hen would have appeared as representative of its *jouissance* as object. The knowledge he obtains on his *jouissance* would include that of the *jouissance* of being the mother's hen.)

Things changed register for the child on the day when an older brother grabbed him from behind, saying to him: "I am the cock, and you are the hen". The child defends itself, he does not want to be the hen. Castration enters the scene. Evidence regarding an unacceptable knowledge about sexual difference is encountered, about the idea of the mother as castrated and about the equivalence between the feminine, the object and passivity. This flash of knowledge succumbs to the avoidance of contact with the true. The hen becomes the mark of castration. This change of register modifies all the subject's relations. A relation of power is established with the brother which is dominated by narcissism. The hen functions as signifier of fear. Castration transforms knowledge which, whilst concealing its truth, preserves the secret of a previous knowledge. The hen, anaclitic object of *jouissance*, becomes a cause of anxiety, then a signifier of fear. This process is activated by the horror of true knowledge. Lacan teaches us that "the passage from the field of anxiety, [...] which is not without an object — on condition that one sees that this object is what is at stake for the subject — to the field of narcissism, reveals the true function of phobia, which is that a frightening signifier is substituted for the object of anxiety".<sup>6</sup>

Lacan is referring, here, to phobia as a turntable which is anterior to the definition of structure, neurosis, hysteria, obsession or perversion. We are proposing to understand the construction of this phobic turntable in relation to logical time on the basis of true knowledge.

### ***The times of phobia***

The instant of seeing corresponds to a revelation concerning an unsuspected knowledge. In the preceding example, the brother's intervention sets up a situation defined by the child's relation to knowledge, that is, to the horror that true knowledge arouses in him. The knowledge of castration, of sexual difference and of the sexual relation is in play, implying a knowledge of the truth of the mother as desiring, that is as castrated. The subject experiences horror, perplexity and anguish, and does not possess the signifying elements that could symbolise these feelings.

The instant in which the child's brother calls him 'hen' separates a before — when 'hen' indicates the *jouissance* of being the object of the mother — from an after, when *jouissance* has the value of a letter. The hen, as object of *jouissance* implying castration, becomes source of anxiety: it becomes part of the matrix of fantasmatic *jouissance*. 'Hen' takes on a signifying value on the basis of the subject's interpretation. 'Hen' passes from its status as letter of *jouissance* to that of master-signifier,  $S_1$ , which initiates

the delusion. Is it not, in effect, delusional to think that a hen wants to peck away at his penis and castrate him? The phallic interpretation devalues the position of the object, the feminine and castration.

The instant of seeing is thus the instant of a confrontation with a knowledge that cannot be obtained: it is situated at the margins of the real.

The time for understanding allows the subject to call to a signifier as a precarious means of defence. Precarious, because the fantasy is not yet completely established, and defensive, because it is substituted for anxiety in a metaphorisation in the signifying chain.

### ***From phobia to perversion***

Without unconscious interpretation, this turntable leads to the constitution of a perverse structure. Little Hans is interested in his mother's knickers as a veil which conceals the reply to his question about the maternal phallus. Separated from the maternal body, as object, they trigger reaction-formations of the neurotic type in little Hans.

Perversion, in making a fetish out of these knickers, disavows castration [*Verleugnung*] and bestows upon the Other the completeness which it lacks.<sup>7</sup>

In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*,<sup>8</sup> Freud situates the horror of castration as the motor of the neurotic processes of defence. Note that it is the increase in drive-tension that confronts the subject with the danger of castration. Lacan recalls that little Hans' erection at the age of four puts into question his capacity to give a satisfying response to his mother.

Freud explains that anxiety is produced by virtue of the child's psychical impotence, analogous to its biological impotence in the face of an excitation that it cannot elaborate in a discharge, and which consequently assumes the value of a 'trauma'. In neurosis, castration and drive-excess are mixed or confused.

An article called *Fetishisation of a Phobic Object*<sup>9</sup> describes this simultaneously exciting and horrifying object. Isabelle Morin<sup>10</sup> takes a step further when she recommends to distinguish, in the encounter with the object in the pass, between the two forms of knowledge revealed in the flash: the first concerns the subject's masochistic *jouissance*, *a*, the second concerns the structure  $-\phi$ , it is a logical deduction,<sup>11</sup> and implies an ethical position of the subject in the face of true knowledge,  $\$(A)$ . The pervert disavows the second and enjoys the first.

### ***The choice of neurosis***

Whether the table turns to hysteria or to obsessional neurosis depends on the type of defence for which the subject makes a forced choice.<sup>12</sup> In the retroaction [*après-coup*] of the pass, we can acknowledge that the obsessional neurotic arrives at a knowledge of the structure by way of a knowledge on his *jouissance*. The hysteric, on the other hand, confronting the Other's inconsistency, deduces from it the knowledge of her *jouissance*. This difference certainly implies different topological spaces.

The polymorphous perverse disposition persists in the neurotic under a fantasmatic form, whilst it takes form in an act in perversion.

One can see in certain testimonies of the pass that once the obsessional defence is lifted, anguish and phobic fears invade the scene, making contact with true knowledge difficult for the subject.

In his testimony, Francisco Pereña<sup>13</sup> speaks of the reappearance of extremely violent nightmares before the end of analysis: "A black bull climbing over a white wall was coming for me, and this horror was waking me up. The analyst put a name on these dreams: phobia, like Hans' horse".

In another testimony,<sup>14</sup> the proximity of a fiery woman produced the anguish and the phobic reactions of the subject, who fears death by burning. The idea that the woman is eternally fiery allowed him to fantasise the existence of the sexual relation and the unbarred Other. The eternal is the obsessional ruse, it makes the sexual relation exist by denying the impossible and the limit of *jouissance* which castration implies.

### ***Logical time***

We can characterise the instant of seeing as metonymic, and write it:  $-\phi \times a \times S_1$  (letter); and the time for understanding as metaphoric, where the signifier 'hen' is substituted for the letter 'hen':

$S_1$ - hen  
—————  
 $S_1$ - letter

By associating castration-anxiety with the signifier, the subject interprets it as coming from 'A', 'A' is the agent of castration and the subject is object of *jouissance*. Its own *jouissance* is attributed to the Other.

The moment of conclusion is the moment in which the phobia as turntable has to be defined. Jacques-Alain Miller, in *The unconscious interprets*,<sup>15</sup> demonstrates that the creation of Hans' phobic object involves an interpretation. Hans is confronting a problem and working to resolve it: in order to do it, he brings in a supplementary element by interpreting it.

Whilst phobia is traditionally attributed to the failure of the paternal function in metaphorising maternal desire, the element-symptom accounts for the lack in the structure, in the elucidation of phobia as turntable: the symptom indexes the missing element of 'minus one', from the one of the letter,<sup>16</sup> which has a stabilising effect, where symbolic, imaginary and real can intertwine.

The signifier which operates the passage from anguish to fear does not just pertain to the symbolic but also to the imaginary: as a signifier, it is also an object,<sup>17</sup> it is constituted as such by a nucleus of the real surrounded by an imaginary halo and takes on a function as supplementation. It indicates the subject's hidden *jouissance* — knowledge of *jouissance* — and the emptiness, the nothingness — knowledge of the structure.

Translated by Richard Klein

1. S. Freud, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year Old Boy*, 1909, SE Vol. 10.
2. J. Lacan, *Le séminaire IV: La relation d'objet*, 1956-57, Seuil, Paris, 1994.
3. J.-A. Miller, *Introducción a la lógica de la cura del pequeño Hans, según Lacan*, Buenos Aires, EOL, 1993; *A lógica da direção da cura*, Belo-Horizonte, EBP-MG, 1995; *Lacan elucidado*, Rio de Janeiro, Zahar, 1997.
4. This text arose out of the reading of Lacan's *Le séminaire XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre*, session of 7 May 1969, unpublished, with the collaboration of Leda Guimaraes.
5. J. Lacan, *La science et la vérité* in *Écrits*, Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 877.
6. J. Lacan, *Le séminaire XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre*, *op.cit.*
7. S. Freud, *Fetishism*, 1927, SE Vol. 21; *The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence*, 1938, SE Vol. 23; *Résultats, idées, problèmes, 1921-1938*, trans. by J. Altounian, A. Bourguignon, P. Cotet, A. Rauzy, Paris, PUF, 1985, pp. 283-286. See also *Structure du fétichisme* (reporter J.-L. Gault) and *Fétichisme et phobie* (reporter G. Clastres) in *Traits de perversion dans les structures cliniques*, Navarin, Paris, 1990, pp. 26-34 and pp. 141-148.
8. S. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, 1925, SE Vol. 20.
9. *Fétichisation d'un objet phobique* in *Scilicet* No 1, Seuil, Paris, 1968, pp. 154-167.
  1. Morin, *Le désir du psychanalyste dans la passe* in *La Cause freudienne* No 27, Navarin/Seuil, Paris, 1994.
10. B. Horne, *Esa sombra espesa*, work presented at the Catalan Section of the EEP-Spain in December 1988.
11. C. Soler, *La elección de neurosis*, Finales de análisis, Buenos Aires, Manantial, 1988.
12. F. Perena, *Del relativismo a la contingencia* in *Acentos* No 12, Bulletin of l'EEP-Spain, December 1996.
13. J. Monseny, *Testimony at the EBP-Bahia* (in the course of publication) in *Agent*, Bulletin of the EBP-Bahia.
14. J.-A. Miller, *El inconsciente interprete* in *Freudiana* No 17, Barcelona 1996, p. 10.
15. C. Soler, *Variáveis do fim do análise*, Sao Paulo, Papirus 1993, p. 200.
16. J.-A. Miller, *op.cit.*, p. 48.