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On Fantasy: Lacan and Klein

What do we do when we analyze? Every so often as the years went by, Lacan would raise this question and it is still as crucial as ever because analysts are not prone to tell how they operate.

This resistance could be considered as a structural position since an analyst--Lacan says--operates by not thinking. Nevertheless, the future and transmission of analysis demand an effort, or shall we say a desire, for knowledge. This paradox is one of the reasons why Lacan founded the pass as a way to develop a taste for transmission among analysts. The "École de la cause freudienne" took the challenge seriously and is now engaged in the process of evaluating the first results.

As for Melanie Klein, she did not hesitate to share her analytic knowledge. She was a determined woman and she certainly deserved the nickname Lacan gave her--not without a shade of admiration--"the inspired tripe merchant". Quite clearly, and without the least ambiguity, Lacan took up her side against Anna Freud in their hectic and endless quarrels. He was, however, firmly opposed to Kleinian theories for his own reasons, and, as soon as they achieved some fame in the mid' thirties, he replied to Melanie in countless articles and seminars.

One of the strongest aspects of Klein's theories rests on her conception of fantasy. In light of the evolutions in Lacan's teachings regarding this concept, I would like to evaluate the use we make of it in psycho-analysis today and compare it to its Kleinian utilization. This problem appears to be still current since Lacan situated the termination of analysis in relation to the crossing over of the fundamental fantasy in his Seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.¹ In short, the understanding a psychoanalyst may have nowadays about the true nature of fantasy has bearings upon

the direction of the treatment, its aims and termination, and, all in all, is an expression of its ethics.

In "The Relations between Obsessional Neurosis and the Early Stages of the Superego," Melanie Klein states that fantasy is unconscious: "*The assumption that the extravagant phantasies which arise in a very early stage of the child's development never become conscious could well help to explain the phenomenon that the child expresses its sadistic impulses toward real objects only in an attenuated form. It should, moreover, be remembered that the stage of development of the ego is an early one and that the child's relations to reality are as yet undeveloped and dominated by its fantasy life.*"² According to Klein, fantasy life not only dominates in the child's early days, but is also present prior to ego development.

In other words, she states that unconscious fantasies have to be made conscious through interpretation and also that they must be inferred. In reference to the discussion of Little Hans in "Inhibition, Symptoms and Anxiety," she reinterprets Hans' fear of being devoured ("to be bitten by the horse"), which Freud considers as a manifestation of castration anxiety, as a more precocious anxiety whose origin lies in a devouring superego and is only attenuated by the toils of the Oedipean castration complex.³ In the Wolfman's case, for example, she contends that some primitive anxieties such as the wolf phobia have never been surmounted in Oedipal terms (which is roughly true and we even may consider them as an elementary phenomenon whose origin is to be found in a lack in the Name-of-the-Father). In this regard we are facing one of the clinical ad-

vantages of her conceptualization which provides us in this particular example with a strong and simple way to catch a clinical distinction which is much more difficult to understand (far more subtle and hesitant, but also more elaborate) in Freud's initial discussion of the case.

Susan Isaacs in her 1948 article, "The Nature and Function of Fantasy," gives an accurate account of Klein's doctrine on this subject matter.⁴ In those years, the discussion focused mainly on the elaboration of Freud's concept of fantasy and also on the respective dating of fantasy in early life. Melanie Klein made a conclusion about what Freud meant by hallucinatory wish-fulfillment in her conception of early phantasy life. She argued that there was a distinction to be made between the plane of castration anxieties (as related to the entrance into the Oedipus complex), and the plane of primitive pre-oedipal anxieties linked to fantasy life. Based on Isaac's classic article, we will keep in mind several main

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features of Klein's argument and will try to discuss them throughout this paper:

1. Fantasy can be considered as the primary content of the unconscious processes;
2. Fantasy, as such, concerns primarily the body;
3. Fantasies are the psychic representations of the drive;
4. The existence of fantasies is independent of external life and also independent of words;
5. Fantasies are both psychic and bodily effects (for example conversion symptoms, personality, character traits, neurotic symptoms, etc.);
6. Fantasies are the link between drives and mechanisms;
7. Adaptation to reality is founded on unconscious fantasy.

Lacan did not wait until Isaacs' article to undertake a complete recasting of Melanie Klein's view: His article "The Family Complexes" was written in 1938 and is obviously directed at Kleinians.⁵ It is his most straightforward introduction to the forthcoming partition between symbolic, imaginary and real that he developed after World War II. But in this early work he makes a division between three complexes:

1. The Weaning complex is directly deducible from Klein's statement: Lacan considers the mother as the symbol of the unity of a totality lost forever. This motherly imago must "be sublimated". If not, the mother as the first salutary influence will become a lethal factor. He illustrates this through the clinics where one finds a "psychical tendency to death"--not violent--but linked to certain "accidents" of weaning (death instincts). It may take on several less dangerous forms including some early forms of *anorexia mentalis*. Those considerations are related to points one, two, five and seven of Isaacs' article.

2. The intrusion complex corresponds roughly to "envy" which was not fully elaborated at that time in Kleinian theory: It is characterized by all the imagery and aggressive relations one has with the other (as counterpart) and is explained by *invidia* which Klein will later put under the heading of death instinct. Lacan distinguishes very carefully between the kind of aggressiveness envy carries and Oedipal "vital rivalry". This intrusion complex is based on identifications. Only in a second step can the issue of the death instinct be discovered. But jealousy can also be lethal. Envy results from a first movement of identification with the counterpart, which applies secondarily to the motherly object with its lethal

cortège and possible psychotic disturbances (this is to be linked essentially to Isaac's points three and six).

3. The Oedipus complex comes third according to Lacan: The issue of the priority of developmental stages as well as the issue of depth in psycho-analytic investigation should be discarded since the Oedipal signifiers are, in fact, retroactively efficient in organizing what the two previous complexes had not achieved (to be compared to Isaac's third statement).

In his outstanding synthesis, Lacan restates the Oedipus complex: 1) in terms of frustration (always attributed by the child to the parent of the same sex); 2) in terms of the constitution of the superego (as the repressing agency); 3) in terms of the birth of the ego-ideal (as belonging to the symbolic agency and, as such, leaning on the paternal side). The castration complex is presented by Lacan as both underlined and sustained by a fantasy built upon a fear of mutilation which is *always* linked to the father (in accordance with the Freudian views). Here, contrary to Klein's approach (especially as summed up by Isaacs), there is no reference made to a feminine phase in both sexes. On the contrary, the father imago, which serves as a representation of the phallus, is prevalent for both boys and girls.

The first step in Lacan's psychoanalytic work, with the exception of the 1936 article presenting his "Mirror Phase," appears to be a fundamental reappraisal and reordering of Kleinian theories. While he gives Kleinian findings their own place, they remain subordinated to a very thorough and strict reading of Freud.⁶

In this early reappraisal Klein's reasoning is supported by dichotomies (early anxieties versus Oedipal ones, the symmetry of male and female sexuality, the harmony of fantasy with symptoms). Lacan himself develops a taste for odds rather than evens: (three agencies, the dialectics between the three "complexes," a discrepancy between fantasy and symptoms, and so forth . . .). Three terms are necessary to define the subject (as a fourth one).

According to Klein, fantasy is a primary content of the unconscious. But her conception raises several questions. I will focus on the problem of the inference of fantasy. The common reference here in Klein and Isaacs' works is Freud's article: "Constructions in Analysis" (1937).⁷ An in-depth reading shows that Freud does not conclude an unequivocal breakthrough to success when the patient says as a consequence of a successful interpretation: "I had never thought of it". On the contrary, Freud seems to regret that such reactions only occur with unimportant interpretations based on

symptoms. In other words, the appearance of subsequent material is not sufficient to appraise the validity of the construction correctly. Moreover it does not elicit the formula of the fundamental fantasy. Fantasy, as opposed to symptoms, always remains, as Freud underlines in 1919, apart from the rest of the neurosis.⁸ Hence one has the question of how to interpret fantasy starting from the formations of the unconscious. As for Lacan, he establishes in 1960 in "Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire" that fundamental fantasy cannot be interpreted since "it partakes of the indices of an absolute signification".⁹ The Lacanian opposition or tension between the fantasy's inertia and the symptom's mobility produce the idea of fantasy as an axiom. The more Lacan developed his theory, the more he thought that fantasy (in its fundamental use) could not be analyzed as such, but only constructed (that is to say compressed) by the analysand

in the course of the analytic process. While it can be traversed at the end of analysis, it cannot, however, be analyzed, inasmuch as it is derived from the three registers: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real.

In 1919, Freud had already called attention to the extreme difficulty his patients encountered in delivering the representative sentence of their basic fantasy.¹⁰ Lacan explains this in his late seminars, related to the fact that the fundamental fantasy is part and parcel of a form of jouissance that is looked upon as alien by neurotic patients: namely the jouissance of the pervert.

The disagreements over the nature of fantasy seem to be homogeneous to opposite conceptions of the function of interpretation. Lacan's conception is minimalist. In "The Direction of the Treatment" and the later texts he recommends that one not feed the symptom with interpretation.¹¹ And, in short, the equivocal or the "half said" (*mi-dire*) is the best status for Lacanian interpretation. The Kleinian style of interpretation, on the contrary, is always explanatory. Even though the Kleinian style has to be carefully distinguished from the indoctrinating ego-psychology style, concerning the content of interpretation it remains highly informative. Lacanian interpretation is always on the side of the oracle. An interpretation does not "interpret" as much as it tends to stir up desire in the patient.

It is the reason why Lacan speaks of a misconception of the Kleinian school regarding fantasy. He goes so far as to state that they are "incapable of even so much as suspecting the existence of the category of the signifier".¹² As for him, on the contrary, "in its fundamental use, fantasy is that by which the subject sustains

himself at the level of his vanishing desire" (272). Therefore, Lacan would define fantasy as "an image set to work in the signifying structure" (272). Starting from this premise, the interpretative position of the analyst is modified. It is no longer a question of revealing the content of the basic fantasy. What is at stake, on the contrary, is an attempt to lead a subject to the point where he is forced to deliver a fantasy that has been slowly simmered and decanted through the analytic process thanks to the exhaustion of his identifications. Only then can he catch sight of the logic of the fantasy at work. The issue is no longer a problem of technique. It entails the proper aims of the treatment, as such.

From this point, we are better equipped to understand why the Lacanian style of psychoanalysis, with its distribution of tasks between analyst and analysand, is more in tune with the Freudian article "Construction in Analysis". In his article, Freud located the construction on the side of hallucinatory memories, along with delirium. Lacan does not hesitate to endorse the Freudian proposal extensively: It is actually the core of his demonstration in his seminar "Desire and its Interpretation".¹³ It is up to the patient to elicit his own fantasy. The analyst will only "authenticate the patient's intention". Lacanian theory indicates that fantasy shows up whenever the unfolding of the signifying chain comes to a dead end, comes to a kind of breach in its development. Jacques-Alain Miller enhanced this aspect of fantasy in his 1982 lectures. For this reason, acting out and *passages à l'acte* come very close to enactments of the fundamental fantasy, even though at the time it might not appear so clearly, even to the analyst.

In the conclusion of her article on fantasy, Isaacs explains that fantasy concerns the body primarily. We will once more oppose her contention to Lacan's orientation. The terms of the controversy are not apparent at first sight since Lacan, as well as Klein, made wide use of Abrahamian objects. Moreover, Lacan added two unidentified objects to the already existing list:

namely, the gaze and the voice. The differences lie in the way these "objects" are used in each perspective.

As an illustration let's take an example in the sixth chapter of *The Four Fundamental Concepts*. In this chapter, Lacan refers to one of his own "objects": the gaze. He delineates a very simple distinction founded on a fact of observation: "Look up some description of a dream, any dream . . . and you will see that not only does *it look* but *it shows* . . . our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see" (75). This sentence means there is

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always something beyond the satisfaction of the eye in every dream. In this chapter Lacan calls it "the stain". A dream cannot be reduced either to a picture or to a narration. For Lacan, the interesting issue in any dream lies in eliciting the point where something reveals that the coincidence of the subject with his bodily perception is dismantled. Satisfaction, Lacan says, may give "the subject a pretext for a profound *méconnaissance*" (74). This is the reason why Lacan will construct his own "object *a*", whatever form it may take, even the nipple or the faeces, for example. This conception of the object is different from an Abrahamian object. In every object likely to appear in the patient's speech there is more than a simple coincidence between the body and satisfaction. The gaze--says Lacan--as "object *a*" comes to "symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration, and insofar as it is an 'object *a*' reduced, of its nature, to a punctiform, evanescent function, it leaves the subject in ignorance as to what there is beyond the appearance". This is where Lacan drives us: beyond the appearance, beyond the looking glass of "reality," straight up to the real.

Perhaps we now have a better view of the differences between Klein and Lacan when Susan Isaacs says in conclusion to her article that fantasy is a means for the child to get acquainted with reality and the means of an apprenticeship in how to adapt to reality. For her, the lost object of Freudian desire is imperceptibly transformed into an object of knowledge.¹⁴ In other words, either it is present or it is missing, but it is not, as for Lacan, lost since the beginning and forever. For Isaacs the object is reduced to an object of knowledge. In this conception, mourning and reparation will be the two main modalities of adaptation to a world "that is not all that bad," as Melanie used to say to young Dick. Anxiety and aggressiveness in this understanding become nothing other than two modes according to which the patient may submit himself, in order to gain some pacification from a "feminine" rage.

This conception did not suit Melanie Klein herself definitively and we know that in her last paper, "On the Sense of Loneliness" (1963), Mrs. Klein reconsidered her idea of termination: "However gratifying it is in later life to express thoughts and feeling to a congenial person, there remains an unsatisfied longing for an understanding without words . . . This longing contributes to the sense of loneliness".¹⁵

Most Kleinians, on the contrary, take the object almost as a gift of nature. The relationship between mother and child is looked upon

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as a dual relation in which no room is left for a lack. The symbolic dimension crashes into the imaginary dimension, ensuring that no chance is left for the subject to encounter castration in its reference to the phallus as an operating tool. In other words, castration and frustration are

collapsed into each other. Therefore Susan Isaacs can describe the fantasy of the unweaned child as "I want to eat my mother's breast and have it inside of my body" (83). Words, in this conception, are only signals "for feelings, image and actions . . ." (85). They are the signs of experience and not the essence of the experience itself. Far from being a simple quarrel over words, this difference leads to different conceptions of the treatment's process between Kleinians and Lacanians. For Kleinians the object is *empirical*. They compound the unconscious drive and the Abrahamian object, while for Lacan and Freud the object is related to our irretrievable loss. By the time she happened to realize it, Mrs. Klein was very old, almost at the edge of death.

Only then was she able to come close to what Lacan uttered as the concluding sentence of *Television*: "From Dad to worse" (Du père au pire).¹⁶

Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts Of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).
 2. Melanie Klein, "The Relations between Obsessional Neurosis and the Early Stages of the Superego," in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, trans. by Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), 210-244: 212-13.
 3. Sigmund Freud, "Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety (1926 [19251]," *SE* 20: 77-175.
 4. Susan Isaacs, "The Nature and Function of Fantasy," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 29 (1948): 73-97.
 5. Jacques Lacan, "Le complexe, facteur concret de la psychologie, familiale," *Encyclopédie française VIII: La vie mentale*, ed. by Henri Wallon (Paris: Larousse, Société de gestion de l'Encyclopédie française, 1938), 8.40.5-8.40.16.
 6. See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. and ed. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 1-7, which is a revised version of *Le stade du miroir*, an English translation of which appears as "The Looking-glass Phase," in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 18, Part I (1937).
 7. Sigmund Freud, "Constructions in Analysis (1937)," *SE* 23: 257-269.
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8. Sigmund Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions (1919)," *SE* 17:177-204.
 9. Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. and ed. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 292-325.
 10. Sigmund Freud, "A Child Is Being Beaten." *ibid.*
 11. Jacques Lacan, "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 226-280.
 12. Jacques Lacan, "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power", 272.
 13. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI (1958-1959): Le désir et son interprétation* (Unpublished Seminar).
 14. Diana Rabinovitch, "La psychose selon Bion," *Ornicar?* 37 (1986): 15-37.
 15. Melanie Klein, "On the Sense of Loneliness (1963)," in *The Writings of Melanie Klein, Volume III: Envy and Gratitude and Other Works (1946-1963)* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 300-313: 301.

16. Jacques Lacan, *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990): 46.