

Colette Soler

History and Hysteria:

The Witty Butcher's wife*

First of all, I would like to explain why I am here to talk about psychoanalysis. I am here as an analyst. Teaching psychoanalysis is not my profession, but it is part of my psychoanalytic work. Although teaching is not my profession as such, teaching was my work before I was an analyst. I was an academic. So I have something in common with the academics present here today. I was an academic specializing in philosophy, and because of Lacan, most philosophers, at least in France, if not in America, knew that they had something to learn from psychoanalysis. I was first interested in psychoanalysis, then, as an intellectual, and it was my meeting with Lacan which changed everything in my life and in my profession. This meeting with Lacan caused me to change my path and to be "trained" in psychoanalysis with him for approximately ten years. Now my main work consists of analyzing people. But let me say something about the teaching of psychoanalysis, about why it is necessary to teach psychoanalysis, as well as to analyze people.

Perhaps you know that Freud, the inventor of psychoanalysis, always taught psychoanalysis. And when he taught, Freud spoke to everyone, directing his lectures to a general audience. But after Freud, and up until Lacan, psychoanalysts have changed Freud's method of teaching psychoanalysis, and reserved it for specialists. That was a major error. Lacan, like Freud, reintroduced the open teaching of psychoanalysis and, like Freud, he did his best to explain what psychoanalysis is and to make it comprehensible. Moreover, such a teaching is necessary because the epistemological status of psychoanalysis is somewhat particular. If you speak about

*Lecture given on October 31, 1991, at the Symposium at the University of Missouri on "History and Hysteria".

mathematics or physics, it is obvious that they can be completely transmitted, assuming that one studies them.

But psychoanalysis is different. Psychoanalysis brought to light new facts concerning human beings: new facts in knowledge, civilization and culture. Like all facts, these new facts are possible to verify, but only within psychoanalysis itself. And this is a restriction. Because the facts can be verified only within psychoanalysis itself, the credibility of psychoanalysis is guaranteed only by the community of analysts and analysands. So, if we don't want psychoanalysis to be identified with an esoteric practice, we have to explain methodically how psychoanalysis works, how it operates, as Freud and Lacan did.

Now let me clarify something here. Sometimes people say: "I had a psychoanalysis. It was wonderful, and I feel better now." Well, it's a testimony but it is not a demonstration, and we have to demonstrate more than that, for everyone. And perhaps that will make some individuals want to verify for themselves that psychoanalysis--the one psychoanalysis--can change a life. Although one can say for sure that psychoanalysis is a great undertaking, it is not what one would call either easy or difficult. Rather, it is something which can change one's life. Psychoanalysis cannot change everything, not the whole of reality. But psychoanalysis can change the subject:

how he values his own life, how he understands what he has done, and what he has to do. So, it is a personal adventure, but not an esoteric one, even though the experience is impossible to reproduce.

Analysts must demonstrate that psychoanalysis is a rational experience which will obviously provoke a lot of feeling, a lot of emotions, but rational all the same. And that is why we teach it: to bring to light the rationality of the analytic experience.

Now my aim today is to explain what hysteria is, what the unconscious is and, perhaps, something more. And I shall do this by using a simple little example which will enable us to go from the easier to the most difficult part to understand. You know I have chosen to use an *écrit* called "The Direction of the Treatment" and to comment on part of it.¹ Perhaps I should point out that the work the psychoanalyst does when listening to his patients is also reading. He reads a text he has to deal with. When we read a text written by Lacan it is something like (I am not saying identical to) the process of listening. Reading a text by Lacan has something in common with psychoanalytic listening. But by "reading" I don't mean paraphrasing. Our work is precisely not to repeat Lacan; is not

17

even to theorize or systematize his teaching. Our primary work is, rather, to explain the text, and then to understand it by extracting the logic of Lacan's teaching. And I think it is only possible if one does a very precise reading: word by word, sentence by sentence. Such an approach to texts explains why we develop seminars in which we work in a dual way in the Freudian Field: we read texts about psychoanalysis (Lacanian texts, Freudian texts, and hundreds of other texts) and we also work on cases.

Now I will try to extract the main signifiers from one of Lacan's texts and show the logic which underlies these signifiers. You know the text I have chosen, the one dedicated to the beautiful and witty butcher's wife. Lacan is the one who called her the "witty hysteric". Before reading this text, I want to put forward a thesis which I shall then try to explain: hysteria, says Lacan, is the unconscious itself actively engaged in appealing to the master to produce a knowledge. Now, I shall give you the example of the beautiful butcher's wife who is a paradigmatic hysteric. This example is particularly interesting for us because the beginning of it is not difficult to understand at all. It's a little dream commented on by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and later on by Lacan.²

Lacan's first purpose in commenting on the dream of the beautiful butcher's wife was to show us how Freud's method of deciphering implies that the unconscious is structured like a language. His second point follows logically: to show what the unconscious is. Third, he wanted to show what hysteria is. Well, this is a big program to develop out of a little example. I shall start by reading the dream because, even if you know the text, perhaps you don't have it exactly in mind at the moment. On page 280 in Sheridan's translation you will find the text describing the dream:

I want to give a dinner. But there's only a little smoked salmon left. I think of going out shopping, then remember that it is Sunday afternoon and all the shops are shut. I tell myself that I'll ring round to a few tradesmen. But the telephone is out of order--So I have to give up my desire to give a dinner.

At the manifest level it is easy to see that the dream is the failure of a wish: the wish to give a dinner. But one must not forget Freud's theory regarding the context of free association: the text

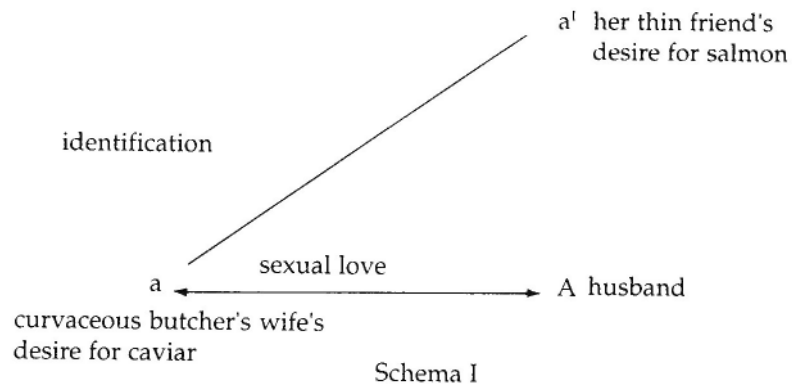
of the dream is not simply the "dream" itself, but rather the dream text plus the associations linked to it.

The full text constructed by way of free association, introduces two people and their respective singularities: the husband and another woman, a friend of the dreamer. The patient describes her

18

husband as a "pleasure seeker". He is not one who looks for sublimated satisfaction. We could just say that he seems to want what you in the States might call "a piece of ass". That is to say, he seems to be satisfied only at the level of flesh, real flesh. And, Lacan says, he was most adept at supplying the satisfaction that everyone, especially his wife, needed. Lacan adds ironically that he is a "genital character."³ We find the expression "genital character" on page 261. The signifier of the husband's position is that of the "piece of ass," then, or the man of the slice of back-side. Secondly, we have the friend; the other woman. She is too thin. And that is a difference with the patient, the beautiful butcher's wife, who is a curvaceous woman. And the beautiful butcher's wife's husband is precisely a man attracted only by curves. He doesn't like thin women. So, we can watch this little trio and see what happens.

The patient and her friend make up the imaginary couple Lacan discussed from the start of his teaching.⁴ Here we have two friends characterized by a marked difference: One is thin and the other curvaceous. And we immediately see that this difference is a significant one in their relation with the third person--I don't say subject, I say person--that is to say, the husband



So there is something very precise about the relation between the husband and the two women. The relationship between the butcher and his wife can be described as a form of love. We are justified in calling it a real love. Perhaps it's not so easy to say what love is. But we can nevertheless evoke, in this context, the idea of love and reciprocal love. So I draw an arrow going in two directions to indicate the reciprocity of a satisfactory sexual relation.

Freud notes that the patient is in love with her husband and always teases him. But there is a little something else. We can speak

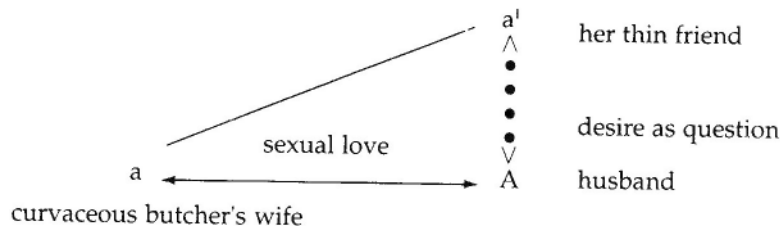
19

of sexual love plus something strange which one finds in the witty butcher's wife's dream associations; that is to say something concerning her behavior with the caviar. She explains that she

likes caviar, she wants caviar, she dreams of having caviar. And yet she refuses to have caviar. Moreover, she begs her husband not to give her caviar. This is surely a bit odd. She is a complicated woman.

Now let's look at Freud's commentary on this dream. First, Freud introduces something which is not present in the associations of the dreamer. But it is, nonetheless, something he knows. He knows that the butcher's wife's friend, the other woman, acts the same way with salmon as her friend does with caviar. So, Freud posits an analogy between the two women related to this behavior--the desire for salmon and the desire for caviar--that leads him to the following conclusions. First, there is an identification between the patient and her friend, an hysterical identification. He says only one thing about this identification: it indicates something in common in the unconscious, linked to sexuality.

The second point in Freud's commentary stresses that the desire for salmon and the desire for caviar indicate the desire for an unsatisfied desire. Well, now we have something more to add to Freud's development, something I will represent in my schema with a broken line:



Schema II

There is something a bit strange about the husband. Although he only likes curvaceous women, he seems interested in his wife's friend, very interested. The patient puts it in these terms: He always "speaks well" of her. And this alone is enough to make her ask why? For the butcher's wife, this fact alone is equivalent to a question mark. Now all sorts of things pertaining to the friend are indicated by the friend's demand to go and dine at the home of the beautiful butcher's wife. And the beautiful hysteric immediately understands that it is her friend's desire to seduce her husband.

Up to now the unconscious has not been present in our commentary. Everything we have said up until now concerns something that is either conscious or preconscious, as Lacan says. In other words, the desire for unsatisfied desire that Freud stressed is not an unconscious desire, but a preconscious one. This means something very precise. It is a desire that is deduced from what the dreamer says, not necessarily a desire reflected by the dream. One can deduce this desire from her conscious speech. So, we don't have anything we can call unconscious. We could say that up until now we have remained at the level of psychology, at the level of something anyone with a bit of intelligence can easily perceive without the help of psychoanalysis or without any special deciphering.

We have to see where the unconscious is in the dream and how the dream leads us to the unconscious. It is a problem which I will try to solve. I will use a commentary of Lacan's which introduces some questions. The first one is: what does desire mean in Freud's thought? You will

find this question, which it is necessary to ask, on page 257. One must ask it because both in the dream and in the free association many desires are evoked: the desire for salmon and the desire for caviar, and the desire for unsatisfied desire. And of course there is a question: what is the unconscious desire of the dreamer? So, when Freud says that dreams are the royal road to unconscious desire, we have to ask what exactly desire is. And Lacan uses the example of this hysteric's dream precisely to show--it's not said in his text, but I'll say it--that unconscious desire is not to be confused with dream wishes.

Freud uses the word *Wunsch* whose English translation is wish. In French we have different words: We have *souhait* and *voeu*. Lacan keeps *voeu* because it sounds like *Wunsch* (wish), but, in fact, it is more or less synonymous with *souhait*. So in French we don't confuse unconscious desire with the preconscious dream wish. To answer the question concerning what unconscious desire is for Freud, Lacan intends to show the structure of the language of the dream. And it is only after having demonstrated the linguistic structure of the dream that he can answer the question regarding what the unconscious and unconscious desire are for Freud.

So, we can now turn to the structure of language in this dream. I will develop this point rather rapidly, as it could be the theme of a whole seminar. And that is not my purpose. I am only explaining what is necessary in order to answer this question: what is the unconscious? Lacan simply stressed that what Freud described is a

21

play of substitutions; if salmon is the signifier of the unsatisfied desire of the friend, caviar is the signifier of the unsatisfied desire of the patient and unsatisfied desire is signified as such by the way the two women behave in relation to salmon and to caviar.

Algorithm of Saussure: Signifier
signified;

Caviar
unsatisfied desire;

Desire for caviar
desire for unsatisfied desire

Schema III

We see that one of these two signifiers has disappeared in the dream where we do not have the caviar. We only have the salmon. And Lacan indicates that this is precisely what he calls metaphor: one signifier is substituted for another signifier. I can write it like this:

SALMON
~~CAVIAR~~

putting a bar through "Caviar" to indicate that it has disappeared from the dream text although it is still present in the signifying chain of free associations in which we encounter it. Hence, Lacan can say that there is a metaphorical substitution. You will find the precise formulae of metaphor and metonymy in the text "The Agency of the Letter."⁵ I am only concerned with the result of the metaphor that produces what Lacan called an effect of positive meaning.

In the dream, you have only one signifier, salmon, but with an addition of meaning. When you have the signifier salmon before the metaphor, that is to say, before the dream, salmon signifies only the unsatisfied desire of the friend. When salmon is substituted for caviar, it does not indicate simply unsatisfied desire: there is something else which remains opaque for the time being, something which refers to what is happening in the little trio, between the friend and the husband, which we need to investigate.

So Lacan says the positive effect of metaphor is the passage from the subject to the meaning of desire. We can write it: The surplus of meaning (+) is the meaning of desire, but desire here is equivalent to an **X**.

22

Salmon

Unsatisfied desire

Metaphor: $\frac{f(S')}{S} S \cong S (+) s = \text{meaning of desire}$

Salmon - - - - - > (+) s = meaning of desire
Caviar

Schema IV

I ought to say something here about the translation. Perhaps it was not possible for him to translate it in another way. But there is a problem. Lacan's expression in French is: "Mais qu'est-ce que la métaphore sinon un effet de sens positif, c'est-à-dire un certain passage du sujet au sens du désir?"⁶ Sheridan's translation is: "But what is metaphor if not an effect of positive meaning; that is to say, a certain passage from the subject to the meaning of the desire". This is a misleading translation. It is not a question of something passing from the subject to the meaning of desire. Rather, it is the subject who is introduced to the meaning of desire. "The meaning of desire" is an expression which has a double signification. It means that the meaning is desire and also that we have to ask ourselves what desire means. So this is a complicated expression that I won't elaborate on now, but there is something to be developed here.

I believe Lacan demonstrated in a very explicit and convincing way in this text that the dream is a metaphor. Later, he speaks about the metonymy of desire. But perhaps this is not so easy to grasp. I have spent a great deal of time trying to understand this point. There is no problem in understanding that caviar is a signifier of unsatisfied desire, to the extent that caviar is an inaccessible object. But the desire for caviar, Lacan says, is the signifier of the desire for unsatisfied desire. That is to say, the desire for caviar signifies the desire for unsatisfied desire. Up to this point there is no problem. Since caviar is the signifier for unsatisfied desire, desire for caviar means the desire for unsatisfied desire. Lacan calls this a metonymy; something which does not produce a positive effect of meaning, which does not introduce anything new at the level of meaning. And that is why he writes the result of metonymy in "The Agency of the Letter" like this:

23

$$f(S \dots S') \cong S (-) s$$

As you can see from the matheme, meaning is less a surplus than a deficit. In the text he refers to the "little meaning". "Little meaning" does not mean no meaning at all. It is more subtle. Why does Lacan say that this metonymic transformation does not produce anything new at the level of meaning? I ask you the question because you might object. You could object to the idea that the desire for unsatisfied desire is something more than unsatisfied desire. Why would it not be possible to object that in this case there is also a surplus of meaning? Unsatisfied desire and desire for unsatisfied desire are not the same. Do you understand this objection? How might one reply to this?

Ms. X: The answer is hysteria. The desire for unsatisfied desire is hysteria speaking.

Yes, but hysteria speaking is what we have to understand. It is not what gives us the solution. It is the enigma here.

Ms. Y: It's the effacing of the self to a certain extent.

I think the answer has to be found only at the level of the combination of signifiers and the effect of this combination. If we had time, we could discuss it for a long time. But that is not the key point here. So I'm going to say what I think the solution is, why Lacan is right in saying that there is no positive effect of meaning in metonymy, although we have change at the level of the signified. Lacan gave a clue to the solution when he said it is the metonymy of the "*want-to-be*" (*manque-a-être*). It is here that you must deduce the solution for yourselves: unsatisfied desire is equivalent to a lack-in-being. And desire for unsatisfied desire means the same; it is equivalent to a lack-in-being. In other words, you have *not* gained anything in the process of metonymy. You have only observed the displacement, the slippage of the "want-to-be".

Having briefly demonstrated the structure of language operating in the dream, we can answer the question regarding what unconscious desire means in Freud's thought. You see that desire is not a simple wish. Desire, unconscious desire, has nothing to do with an aspiration, a goal, an intention. Unconscious desire is something signified by the combination of the signifiers. And here you can see the problem: who is the organizer of the substitution of signifiers? We see that salmon has been substituted for caviar in the witty

butcher's wife's dream. We see that the desire for caviar has been combined with the signifier caviar. But who did this, who is responsible? Obviously, not the patient who said "I"; "I have a dream". She had the dream, but *who* is the organizer of the dream?

The organizer of the dream is what Freud called the unconscious. You thus immediately observe that the subject is not the organizer, but rather the effect. The subject is something signified by the combination of signifiers and perceived in the deciphering of signifiers; that is, by the construction of the complete sequence of caviar, desire for caviar and salmon, desire for salmon. But this unconscious subject is something that the patient is not aware of. The patient does not have any idea of what it is. It is something which only becomes known via the process of deciphering signifiers. So you see why Lacan put so much stress on the fact that Freud's discovery changed everything about our idea of what a subject is. He changed everything because he

showed that there is something which works alone without consent in the patient who says "I", without the patient's knowing it, but nonetheless something which belongs to him and defines him. And so, with his analysis of this little dream, Lacan gave us a simple idea of the eccentricity of unconscious desire in Freud's thought.

* * * *

Our second question concerns, not the unconscious itself, but hysteria. What does the hysterical butcher's wife want? But first, let us digress for a moment in a parenthesis. If you think carefully, you will perceive that we have two meanings of the word unconscious or perhaps two kinds of unconscious. On the one hand, what we call the Lacanian unconscious is what Freud calls the work of the unconscious, that is to say the work of substituting signifiers. On the other hand, there is another thing we call unconscious: that is the specific desire of the dreamer. These are two different aspects of the unconscious. The unconscious is the ideal worker, as Lacan said, never on strike, always working, day and night. The unconscious is a worker. But the unconscious as a worker is not the same thing as the unconscious which Freud interprets by deciphering the elaboration of signifiers, which is what he called unconscious desire; that is to say, something particular to one person.

One can, however, find this Freudian distinction in Lacan when he distinguishes the unconscious as a knowledge from the unconscious as a subject. He writes the concept of the unconscious as a knowledge with the matheme S_2 , and the unconscious as a subject

25

as S barred: $\$$. The first one is simply the signifying chain and the network of signifiers that constitute the unconscious as a worker. The second one is what Freud called unconscious desire. In speaking of the unconscious as a subject we are interested in a specific psychoanalysis. To know that metaphor and metonymy function in one's unconscious is useful and it is something universal. But what interests the patient is the specificity of desire which defines him or her.

What is the desire of the hysterical butcher's wife? I will try to answer this question now. To do so requires the distinction, as Lacan showed, of the three identifications functioning for this patient. You will find this on pages 261 and 262. To summarize: First of all we have the identification which identifies--because an identification identifies something with something--the patient with her friend. We can see such identification at the imaginary level: $a-a'$. The signifying *mechanism* which indexes this identification is the metaphor: salmon substituted for caviar. But what is the object of the identification? What is the butcher's wife identified with? We can say that she is identified with the trait of unsatisfied desire belonging to her friend. This is a first approximation. But we see that not only does the friend have an unsatisfied desire; she shows it. She exhibits her unsatisfied desire. It's a game of exhibiting the lack-in-being. She presents herself as lacking (*manquant*). But why? Because it's charming. It's very charming when a woman manages to find a unique way, something which is very particular to her, a way of making herself feel that she is lacking. And we see that the husband, the butcher, is not at all insensitive to this. So, it is very obvious that the patient intends to identify herself with the *agalma* of her friend.

Do you know the word *agalma*? *Agalma* is a Greek word Lacan uses in the *Séminaire* on Transference when he comments on the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades as a model

of transference. *Agalma* is what makes someone attractive. We can say it is the object of attraction, the object with which we manage to capture the interest of the Other. The witty butcher's wife's first identification is an intent to appropriate to herself the seductiveness embodied by her friend. By saying this we implicitly introduce the third person, that is to say, the Other with a capital. The husband is the person who has to be seduced. I'm not going to say the husband is the cause, but the reason of this first identification between the two women.

27

The reason is to be found at the level of the desire of the Other. And this is why Lacan says that the secret of this identification implies, not simply a reference to the desire of the husband, but a question about the desire of the Other. Lacan stresses this very precisely on page 262 when he says: "But how can another woman be loved (isn't it enough for the patient to think about it, rather than that the husband should consider her?) by a man who cannot be satisfied by her (he, the man of the slice of backside)? That's precisely the question, which is usually that of hysterical identification, brought into focus." So, "What does he want?" is the implicit question which allows us to understand the first identification of the hysteric.

You could ask where the question is present in the material of the dream and free associations, if you are concerned with objectivity--and you have to be concerned with objectivity I think. It is present in a little signifier: the slice of salmon. Until now I have only spoken of salmon and caviar. But observe that in the dream it is not salmon. It is a slice of salmon. We can see that we now have two slices or pieces: the slice of backside and the slice of salmon. We remember that the slice of backside is the signifier for the husband's sexual satisfaction. So the slice of salmon is an allusion to the first slice, the slice of backside, but combined with the signifier salmon which we already know is a signifier for desire as unsatisfied. So, Lacan is allowed to say that the slice of salmon comes into the place of the Other's desire, the desire of the Other, the desire of the other as a question, shown by the broken arrow in Schema II, the husband himself being at the place of the Other. In the dream the only thing the butcher's wife has to offer is a slice of salmon and this indicates very precisely what she is looking for. So, we have a combination in which the piece of salmon is substituted for the "piece of ass".

But what is the subject signified? This subject is nothing more than the question of desire. Lacan says it clearly: the subject becomes the question. And it is a question in which the woman identifies herself with the man. This is an important point about hysteria. We see that at the level of the "I" the patient is a woman identified with the seductive trait of another woman. But at the level of the unconscious this woman is identified with the man, as the substitution of slice of salmon for slice of backside indicates. Let's return to the idea of the subject as question. This subject is nothing more than the question of the Other. It does not say what unconscious desire is, but that the subject him self is the question of desire.

27

But we also have to answer the question about what unconscious desire is. Lacan gives the answer: to be the phallus, if only a somewhat thin one. It's more beautiful in French: "Être le phallus, fût-il un phallus un peu maigre". In French there is a nuance with the tense of the verb and so it's difficult to translate into English. Might it be a thin one, a somewhat thin one? To be the phallus means nothing more than to be the lack of the Other. And here you see that what is at

stake is not only the subject taken as a question. It is the being of the subject. What the subject is beyond the question. What is at stake is the being of the subject.

Here we have the third fundamental identification, the last identification which identifies the being of the subject and the phallus, that is to say, in that period of Lacan's teaching: the lack. We can write it like this if we want:

ϕ
§

And Lacan never changed his mind about this point. The fundamental identification which defines the hysterical subject is the identification with the lack of desire and not with the positive cause of desire. He says this, explicitly, in 1973 in his introduction to the German edition of the *Ecrits*.⁸ It is a very precise thesis, and it is why he says that the central object in hysteria is the "nothing" (the *rien*). The nothing is the lack made object. So you see that we have answered our question: the unconscious desire the patient is not aware of is the desire for being the lack of the Other.

Now, I want to make some comments and developments. I want to develop something first of all concerning the beautiful butcher's wife and Socrates. You are familiar, or you will be familiar with, the *Séminaire* on Transference which was recently published in Paris. In that seminar Lacan elaborated a commentary on Plato's dialogue called the *Symposium*. I would like to point out the numerous similarities between Socrates, the hysterical subject, and the beautiful butcher's wife. Lacan indeed has always said that Socrates was the greatest hysteric in Western culture, both at the level of his symptom and at the level of his role within our culture and our philosophy. Notice first of all that in the butcher's wife's dream we have a dinner. In Plato's dialogue we have a banquet. In both cases we are in the land of plenty. The land of plenty is America I have been told. But in Greece and Vienna they also have their banquets.

28

Plato stresses that they eat, drink, and make love. Nothing is lacking at this level. But then there is the figure of Socrates who makes them speak about love. That is to say, someone who incarnates lack. The central opposition Lacan elaborates is between Alcibiades and Socrates. Alcibiades is a man who goes as far as possible in his *jouissance*, Lacan says in "Subversion of the Subject".⁹ He is the man who incarnates both the *jouissance* of love and the *jouissance* of power. He is another "piece of ass" man.

But what is the function of Socrates? Socrates, in contrast, is a man who does not eat, drink or sleep. Plato described Socrates emphatically as someone who only speaks and asks questions. Plato said very explicitly that they ate and drank all night long when Socrates spoke. And at the end of the banquet they were all asleep, all except Socrates still awake, who spends his time without any rest. Socrates, like the unconscious, does not need rest. We see that Socrates' main occupation is to introduce lack into the plentifulness of the society of masters. He does this in a special way, at the level of his teaching, with his questions about what they know. His work--like that of the unconscious which is a hard worker--consists in making them understand that their knowledge does not work completely, that there is something lacking in their knowledge.

Socrates arouses their interest by introducing a metonymy--Lacan uses this term--a metonymy towards another object. For example, if they are speaking about a beautiful object they love, what does Socrates do? He explains that the beautiful object is something, not nothing, but that there is something more, something more interesting about this object, and it is the beauty in itself. Socrates' teaching thus consists in introducing a metonymy in relation to a new object, an actual object in the world. We can observe that his strategy is the same at the level of love. We know that under the sheets in bed with his lover, Socrates continues speaking. Speech and nothing more. This is an amusing aspect of Alcibiades' speech. He describes Socrates as continuing, even beneath the sheets, to incarnate what we can call the privation of sexual satisfaction in the everyday sense of the word. And yet he continued to give a place to another desire, an enigmatic one, the desire articulated in either his speech or his silence. So the beautiful butcher's wife and Socrates show us the same thing; they stress the same point.

At the "pathological" level the hysterical subject is defined by what Lacan called the assumption (*assomption*) of deprivation.¹⁰ In

the world of commerce it could be called the promotion of privation. But there are two levels: the pathological and the epistemological. At the epistemological level the hysterical subject is defined as a question and not simply as desire for satisfaction. The idea of "the assumption of privation" is an expression describing hysteria that Lacan used only later in his teaching. It means that what the hysterical subject wants is not the jouissance of flesh, far from it. What the hysterical subject wants is a negativization of this kind of jouissance in the Other. And this is why Lacan can say later that what the beautiful butcher's wife did not know was that she wanted to give her wonderful husband to the other woman. We should not assume that the patient, as a subject of the unconscious, only wants satisfaction, any kind of satisfaction. And Lacan's idea is precisely this: the beautiful butcher's wife wants to lend her husband to another woman to be rid of his jouissance, his sexual jouissance of the flesh. That is why in the clinic of the hysterical subject there is something that psychoanalysts sometimes qualify as a masochistic position. But perhaps this has nothing to do with masochism. It has to do, rather, with what I call not the temptation of lust, but the temptation of privation. Hysterical subjects are often tempted by sacrifice. Propelled by a strange desire, they desire to negate what belongs to the level of having or possessing. In hysteria we encounter stark manifestations of something like an asceticism.

At the epistemological level hysteria is a question. But what does this mean? It means that hysteria is a demand for knowledge. The question itself is nothing more than a demand for knowledge. It is very obvious in the simple question: what does he want? Not just any knowledge is at issue in hysteria, however, but a knowledge about desire, about the cause of desire. But here we should stress that demand is not desire, although every demand implies a desire which is different from the demand. So what is the desire which corresponds to the demand for knowledge, the demand of the beautiful butcher's wife? She asks for knowledge about the desire of the Other, but you can see that at the end of the dream she gives up the idea of hosting a dinner. As Lacan pointed out, she renounces knowledge. She gives up the search for the secret.

Thus, there is a relation between hysteria and knowledge. But one does not have to suppose that it is a desire for knowledge. On the contrary, it is the demand for knowledge represented by the subject as a question. As we said earlier, the desire which drives this demand for knowledge addressed to the Other is the desire for being. We can write it:

Demand for knowledge
Desire for being

The desire for being is another thing entirely from the desire for knowledge. And this is the drama of hysteria: she asks for knowledge but what she is waiting for, searching for, is being. This drama is linked with the subject as a question. At the end of the beautiful butcher's wife's dream, for example, we see that she asks Freud to produce knowledge. As Lacan puts it, at the end of the dream everything has gone wrong. And you say that a dream is wish fulfillment? How do you work that one out, professor? That is the hysterical subject's challenge to knowledge. We could also say something about the discourse of the hysteric. The question was asked at the conference yesterday: is hysteria as a discourse the same thing as hysteria as a clinical structure? I would reply in the affirmative. Yes, they are the same thing. Put simply, Lacan did not develop the structure of hysteria as a discourse until the 1970s. But there are not two hysterias, a pathological one and a discourse. They are the same. Perhaps we can develop this point in the discussion, but what I want to stress just now is the presence of impotence written in the lower part of the hysteric's discourse.

$$\begin{array}{l} \underline{S} \rightarrow \underline{S}_1 \\ a // S_2 \end{array}$$

In other words, the knowledge produced by the hysterical discourse is never allowed to grasp its object. This is what Lacan means by saying that the object defies or challenges the knowledge.

Maybe I should make one or two additional points. Did you notice that I have methodically avoided the word *jouissance*? We can introduce it now Lacan does not use this word in his comments on the butcher's wife. He speaks, rather, of the need for satisfaction in its opposition to desire as lack. We see immediately that at that time he called need sexual satisfaction. We usually call satisfaction that corresponds to a level of *jouissance*, phallic *jouissance*. Lacan constructs an opposition between this *jouissance* and the lack in desire, or desire as lack. But afterwards he complicates the first approximation to show that desire is not only a lack. Rather, desire implies what he calls a surplus of *jouissance*. One may connect the notion of the lack of desire with a surplus of *jouissance*, but this would require another set of arguments which I will not develop now.

Let me say a few words in conclusion. I was thinking about America as the land of plenty and the relation between the land of plenty and hysteria. As the land of plenty, it seems to me that America represents Europe's future in the sense that the land of plenty is always expanding, always getting more. And this is an effect of science. It is not an effect of literature, but of science. We might suppose that the land of plenty kills desire insofar as desire is lack, is the want-to-be or the lack-in-being. I don't think so. On the contrary, the land of plenty generates desire after desire, an insatiable desire. It is a fact that the development of science has a specific effect: the production of objects. New objects are produced, new possibilities which are offered

up to desire. And that is why Lacan says that science now commands our desire. So, I don't think that the land of plenty kills desire, but rather that the land of plenty changes the nature of desire.

To be more precise, I believe that the nature of desire is reduced to the desire of the want-to-have or lack-in-having, an expression I propose by way of an analogy to the want-to-be. Lacan identifies the nature of desire with the want-to-be, but the want-to-have is also a kind of desire. It is a transformation of desire, one which is present in Freud's teaching. What Freud called penis envy is a definition of desire at the level of having. Perhaps he was wrong to situate this desire at the level of having, but it still seems to me that our civilization is reducing the always more in desire into a lack-in-having. Or perhaps it would be better to say that our culture satisfies desire only at the level of the want-to-have. So, we have to ask where the symptoms of the want-to-be are now. This is a way of asking where hysteria is today. It would be a research program in itself: where are the symptoms of the want-to-be? There are many answers to this. I have one or two. Perhaps you have some ideas too. But I think any answer will show that there are new symptoms of the want-to-be today, and this because the want-to-be cannot manifest itself in the same way when you are continually forced into a preoccupation with the want-to-have.

Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W Norton, 1977), 226-280.
2. Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," *SE* 4 & 5:1-627.
3. This is a reference to Freud's theory that character develops in three phases: oral, anal and genital. Post-Freudian psychoanalysts have followed

Freud's theory, basing their practice on the notion that analytic cure (i.e. normal maturity) is equitable with the genital character who has a harmonious sexual relation with one partner. See Sigmund Freud, "New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1933 [1932])," *SE* 22: 7-182. Not only does Lacan disagree with Freud's biologically based theory, he teaches that analysis proves nothing more than the lack of a natural harmony between the sexes. See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XX (1972-73): Encore*, text established by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

4. This is a reference to Lacan's discovery that what we generally call "personality" is constituted inter-subjectively, i. e. out of a relationship. His doctoral dissertation developed the thesis that a dual narcissism--concretely constituted out of primary identification--lies at the heart of any personality and serves as the basis of all future relationships. See Jacques Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*. Thèse de Doctorat en Médecine, Faculté de Médecine de Paris (Paris: Le François, 1932).

5. Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud," in *Écrits: A Selection* trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1977), 146-178: 156 ff.
6. Jacques Lacan, "La direction de la cure et les principes de son pouvoir," in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 585-645: 622.
7. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VIII (1960-61): Le transfert*, text established by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991).
8. Jacques Lacan, *Schriften I*, ed. by Norbert Haas, trans. by Norbert Haas, Rodolphe Fasché, et al. (Olten, Switzerland: Walter-Verlag, 1973).
9. Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Écrits: A Selection* trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 292-325.

10. The word "assumption" here is meant in the religious sense.