

Seminar II as Teaching: Lacan's Demonstration of a Technique for Inferring Symbols From What is Not Explained by Objects

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Concerning the dream that Fairbairn uses to explain his 'objectified analysis', Lacan says:

[T]he crucial fact is that the dream isn't dreamt at any old time, any old way, nor is it addressed to no one. (Lacan 1954-55, p.255¹)

Lacan makes remarks like this from time to time because they remind his students of the importance of speech while stressing some relevant aspects of speech, but since Lacan is aware that his teaching is also speech, one can turn the comment around and ask why Lacan says it when he says it, and to whom is it addressed. The question of time is particularly important because, at this point in *Seminar II*, Lacan is neither elaborating his theory nor relating it to Freud's work. And he's not addressing this comment to ego analysts or to followers of Fairbairn, he's addressing his own students.

The fact that Lacan isn't explaining anything new leads me to believe that what he's really demonstrating is how to use the notion of *speech* and *objects* to imply the presence of *symbols*. Indeed, even when Lacan presents specific details of his theory, he always stresses the way in which objects alone don't explain what is in question. And even when the situation is reversed, and symbols are shown to imply the presence of something other than symbols, his approach is similar.

Towards the beginning of *Seminar II*, Lacan presents the *Meno* as an example of symbols implying the presence of something other than a symbol. For Lacan, a symbol is nothing more than something that can be spoken and that is defined only by its opposition to other symbols. This definition of symbol entails that there is no way a new symbol can be introduced into a language unless it comes from someplace outside the symbolic order, because a language is closed and self-contained

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And once a new symbol has been introduced, there is no way for the symbolic order to account for the way in which it was introduced, because the new symbol will have value only in terms of other symbols, and this value can have no connection with whatever non-symbols brought about the introduction of the new symbol.

It is [the eternal forms'] awakening in the subject which explains the passage from ignorance to knowledge. In other words, one can't know anything, if only because one already knows it. But this isn't, properly speaking, the aim of the *Meno*. (Lacan 1954-55, p.15)

For Lacan, it isn't true that one can't know anything; one can know something as long as one takes into account things other than symbols. The introduction of a new symbol is necessarily carried out by two or more people, at some time, and through some use of objects. If one is familiar with Lacan's notion of symbols and objects, this point will seem obvious. Lacan, however, does more than just make this point, he claims that this notion is implied by the *Meno* itself.

The aim and the paradox of the *Meno* is to show us that the epistémé, knowledge bounded by a formal coherence, does not cover the whole of the field of human experience. (Lacan 1954-55, p.15-16)

From the moment that a part of the symbolic world comes into existence it does indeed create its own past. But not in the same way as the form at the intuitive level. It is precisely in the confusion of the two planes that the error lies, the error of believing that what science constitutes by the intervention of the symbolic function has always been there, that it is given. (Lacan 1954-55, p.18-19)

For Lacan, then, the *Meno* is not a paradox as long as one is aware of the *moment* and the *objects that bring about the introduction of a symbol. His notion of symbols and objects*

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allows him to explain exactly why the error of 'confusing the two planes' is hard to avoid. For Lacan, the error doesn't arise simply because of the misleading nature of the symbolic, it arises because of a tendency to forget who introduced a given symbol to a given person, as well as when and how it was introduced. Lacan says that if one takes account of the shift from the imaginary to the symbolic, then one can know how a symbol was used when it was first introduced to a given person, at the moment when the new symbol changed the value of every other symbol. This, for Lacan, is the sort of understanding that is needed for psychoanalysis.

Everything which takes effect in the field of analytic action precedes the constitution of knowledge, which doesn't change the fact that in operating in this field we have constituted a knowledge. (Lacan 1954-55, p.19)

But, he concedes, errors caused by the constitution of knowledge are inevitable.

This error exists in all knowledge, inasmuch as it is only a crystallization of the symbolic activity, and once constituted, it forgets it. In all knowledge there is a dimension of error, which is the forgetting of the creative function of truth in its nascent form. (Lacan 1954-55, p.19)

So, for Lacan, the *Meno* is not merely an example of a rigorous application of the distinction between objects and symbols, it is also an illustration of a mistake commonly made in understanding analytic theory. The fact that Lacan is trying to get his students to grasp ideas that precede the constitution of knowledge helps explain Lacan's approach to teaching and his style of presentation. Not only does the content of his teaching warn against forgetting and how exactly the new knowledge come about, but perhaps Lacan is also deliberately trying to make it

difficult to integrate the things he says into constituted knowledge, thus forcing his students to consider the presentation and the details

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of his teaching because they can't immediately reduce it to knowledge.

The ego's tendency toward maintaining a constitution of knowledge is the aspect of the ego that Lacan calls *resistance*. While the *Méno* explains why it is not safe to discard what does not fit with one's constituted knowledge, it is resistance and the ego which explains why people tend to do just that.

In this teaching, as in an analysis, we have to deal with resistances.

The resistances always have their seat in the ego, so analysis teaches us. What corresponds to the ego, is what I sometimes call the sum of the prejudices which any knowledge comprises and which each of us have as individual baggage. It is something which includes what we know or think we know--for knowing is always in some way believing one knows. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 41)

An object, for Lacan, is anything perceived as spatially cohesive by another object. And, for Lacan, an ego is an object and therefore must see itself in order to exist to itself. But the role of the ego in maintaining prejudices is not a direct result of its nature as an object, nor is it simply a result of the closed nature of the symbolic order. The role of the ego in maintaining prejudices can only be understood when one notes that while it is a consequence of Lacan's definition of object that an object is only persistent to itself as long as it continues to perceive itself as spatially cohesive, a symbol that names an object can give the object a different sort of persistence, since symbols in themselves are timeless.

So an object that is named by a symbol can persist when not being seen, but this persistence depends on the symbol not changing. And since the value of a symbol depends on every other symbol the introduction, change, or disappearance of a single symbol will change every other symbol and create a different symbolic order, meaning that an object whose persistence depends on one of the old symbols will no longer exist when not being seen. Thus, the persistence of the ego depends

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not only on its being attached to a symbol, but also on that symbol not changing, which means that no other symbol can change either.

Resistance, then, is an ego's tendency to keep every symbol from changing in value in order to insure the ego's own persistence. Lacan contrasts the maintenance of the value of every symbol with the fact that a shift in perspective will tend to change these values, and he connects the ego's role in resistance with the tendency to return to one's habitual center of perspective as soon as a new perspective has been introduced.

[W]hen you are shown a new perspective, in a manner which is decentred in relation to your experience, there's always a shift, whereby you try to recover your balance, the habitual centre of your point of view--a sign of what I am explaining to you, which is

called resistance. What you should do, on the contrary, is open your minds to the notions being generated by another domain of experience, and turn it to your profit. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 41)

So Lacan is saying that the coherence of knowledge sought by the ego is a threat to learning because it causes one to lose sight of a new perspective which would threaten the consistency of the symbols that give the ego its persistence.

This is similar to what he had already said concerning the *Meno*, except here, instead of warning against crystallization of knowledge, he is warning against the recovery of one's habitual center after a change in perspective. Although they both relate to the way in which every symbol is defined by its opposition to every other symbol, the points are different in the way they illustrate the connection between a symbol and an object. In the *Meno*, the problem is the forgetting of the role of an object in the introduction of a new symbol, while the resistance of the ego illustrates how a change in a symbol effects the ego and its persistence, which is only guaranteed insofar as it is linked to a symbol that doesn't change. But what I want to stress is that the *Meno* is not explained simply by symbols, and that resistance of the ego is not explained simply by objects,

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but that each case becomes fairly straightforward when one either uses the limitations of objects to infer the role of symbols, or when one uses the limitations of symbols to infer the role of objects.

The problem of resistance allows us to appreciate Lacan's use of *surprise* and *change in perspective* in his teaching, in order to avoid giving his students an opportunity to regain their own centers. In Lacan's discussion of the dream of Irma's injection, he suggests that a change in perspective is implied by the dream itself, and his presentation emphasizes the sudden, unexpected way in which the dream changes, forcing the change from the perspective of an object to the perspective of a symbol.

In his previous lecture, Lacan had asked the question *who is the subject*, which means both who is the subject in any particular instance of speech, and what sort of thing is a subject. In the same lecture, Lacan brings up the idea of regression that Freud presented in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, saying that regression was Freud's solution to a problem which had arisen not because of some as yet unexplained phenomenon, but because of a difficulty in the schema of the psyche that Freud had, at that time in the development of his theory, adopted. This is important because Lacan will present his own idea of regression which is not the same as Freud's.

Examining Freud's account of the dream of Irma's injection, Lacan begins by taking the perspective of an ego. He says:

In the dream itself, Freud shows himself as he is, and his *ego* is completely at home on the level of his vigilant *ego*. (Lacan 1954-55, p.154)

From the perspective of an ego, it is possible to see objects and other egos, but this doesn't mean that the significance of these egos in Freud's dream is straightforward.

The first time around, accompanying Irma's ego we've found three feminine characters. Freud remarks that there is such a profusion of intercalations at this point that in the end things are knotted together and one ends up confronted with an unknown mystery. (Lacan 1954-55, p.157)

At this point, Lacan had already emphasized the importance of the dream of Irma's injection, quoting Freud's letter to Fliess, in which Freud

[imagines] that one day perhaps there will be inscribed, on the threshold of the house in the country at Bellevue where this dream took place--*In this house on July 24th, 1895, the secret of dreams was revealed to Dr. Sigmund Freud.* (Lacan 1954-55, p.150)

Having affirmed the importance of Freud's dream and having examined the dream from the point of view of an ego, Lacan points out a critical point in the dream, the point where Irma opens her mouth and Freud looks inside. For Lacan, this is the point that marks the shift from the perspective of an object to the perspective of a symbol.

There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands *par excellence*, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final revelation of you are this-- *You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness.* (Lacan 1954-55, p.154-155)

For Lacan, this change from the perspective of an object to the perspective of a symbol is implied by the dream simply because, at this point, there are no objects present whose perspective one could adopt. Considering the context of the lecture, which is the question of regression and the question *who is the subject*, and considering that Lacan has stressed the importance

of this dream so strongly and identified a critical point, it's easy enough to expect that he will say something about this dream that will explain both regression and the question *who is the subject*. But his answer is completely unexpected: he writes the formula for trimethylamine on the board, the formula that appeared to Freud at the end of his dream, claiming that it explains everything.

This explains everything, *trimethylamine*. The dream does not only owe its meaning to Freud's research on the meaning of dreams. [...] The dream, which culminated a first time, when the ego was there, with the horrific image I mentioned, culminates a second time at the end with a formula, with its *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* aspect, on the wall, beyond what we cannot but identify as speech, universal rumour.

Like my oracle, the formula gives no reply whatsoever to anything. But the very manner in which it is spelt out, its enigmatic, hermetic nature, is in fact the answer to the question of the meaning of the dream. One can model it closely on the Islamic formula--

There is no other God but God. There is no other word, no other solution to your problem than the word. (Lacan 1954-55, p.158)

This is the culmination of Lacan's comments on the dream of Irma's injection, that there is no other solution than the word. This answer is close to absurdity or even nonsense. He answers both the question of regression and the question *who is the subject* in a kind of flash: the word is the subject, and the emergence of the word is regression.

For Lacan, regression *is* the dream's shift to the perspective of the symbol, brought about by the fact that there are no longer any objects present at all. The fact that there is still someone dreaming when there are no objects present means that the subject must be a symbol. Lacan will go on to give more examples of the properties of the subject that can't be explained by taking the subject as an object, but I want to stress the way in which Lacan presents *the word*, the surprising emergence

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of the word which answers every question without making any sense at all. For Lacan, the emergence of the symbolic is always sudden and unexpected, whether or not it is brought about by the absence or dissolution of objects.

The nature of the symbolic, I myself also want to introduce you into it by telling you, to serve you as a marker--symbols only ever have the value of symbols. (Lacan 1954-55, p.160)

The pleonasm 'I myself' reminds his students not to forget from whom they learned about the symbol, implying that they also shouldn't forget how and when.

Having presented *The Dream of Irma's Injection* as a case where objects dissolve leaving only symbols, Lacan turns to the case where there are only objects and no symbols. Since an object's essence is its being seen as spatially cohesive by another object, there is no identity of a given object from one perceiving object to another, just as there is no identity of an object to the same perceiving object if there is even a moment when it isn't perceiving that object. It is the name attached to an object that preserves the identity of that object between two or more subjects, and it is the name that preserves the identity of an object to the same perceiving object when the perception is interrupted.

That is where the symbolic relation comes in. The power of naming objects structures the perception itself. The *percipi* of man can only be sustained with a zone of nomination. It is through nomination that man makes objects subsist with a certain consistence. If objects had only a narcissistic relationship with the subject, they would only ever be perceived in a momentary fashion. The word, the word which names, is the identical. The word doesn't answer to the spatial distinctiveness of the object, which is always ready to be dissolved in an identification with the subject, but to its temporal dimension. (Lacan 1954-55, p.169)

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Lacan says that the constitution of the object is based on the constitution of the ego. This point is obvious when one considers that only an object can perceive another object, so it is only as a ego that a person can perceive an object. But Lacan means more than just this. He also means that an ego seeing itself and another object has no way of knowing which is it and which is the other object.

The object, at one instant constituted as a semblance of the human subject, a double of himself, nonetheless has a certain permanence of appearance over time[.] (Lacan 1954-55, p.169)

So while in some ways the situation with objects and no symbols is the opposite of the situation in Freud's dream where there are symbols but no objects, it is similar when one considers how the first object will be named, because the voice that names an object cannot be associated with any object, so it must be 'the voice of no one.'

It is only after this first naming that one can properly speak of time because, while symbols are timeless and objects are transient, attaching a timeless symbol to an object changes its transience into periodicity. So, just as symbols without objects cannot mark time, objects without symbols cannot mark time either.

Lacan presents this on the same day that he presents the conclusion of his discussion of *The Dream of Irma's Injection*, so it could be taken as a re-statement of the nonsensical nature of the symbol, and the way it emerges from nowhere as universal rumor. But when Lacan talks about desire, it will become clear that the first naming is also the beginning of desire, and the dissolution of objects is both the proper emergence of de-sire and the end of time for the subject.

But first I will discuss Lacan's account of *The Purloined Letter*, in which he says something more affirmative about the symbolic, again through the use of changes in perspective made necessary by the fact that some phenomena can't be explained by objects alone. When he says:

At this point, it isn't only Dupin speaking, but the storyteller, the mirage of the author. We will see what this mirage signifies. (Lacan 1954-55, p.195)

He immediately reminds his students to take note of perspective, and he points out that the perspective of the author isn't the same as that of the storyteller. He is stressing that the story is not just a series of symbols, but a series of symbols linked to a source, and that this source isn't just another symbol, it's an object, 'the mirage of the author' .

When, later in his recounting of the story, Lacan says:

There are two great scenes--not in the sense in which we say primal scene--the scene of the letter purloined and the scene of the letter recovered, and then some accessory scenes. (Lacan 1954-55, p.195)

He mentions the primal scene by way of negation, but it's important that he mentions it, considering the things he says about not forgetting about the moment of the shift from the imaginary into the symbolic. Probably this comment is no more than a reminder not to forget about this moment. Next, he talks about the perspective of the letter. Again this serves as a

demonstration, showing that the proper perspective isn't usually the most obvious or natural choice.

Yes, of course, the letter and not the person who sends it. Although his name is given towards the end of the novel, he has only a fictional importance, whereas the letter is indeed a character. It is so much a character that we are completely entitled to identify it with the key-schema we came upon, at the end of the dream of Irma's injection, in the formula for trimethylamine. (Lacan 1954-55, p.196)

By saying that we are entitled to identify the letter with the key-schema, he is saying that the letter, as a symbol, can be seen as a subject, and that it has a point of view. He continues in the same passage:

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The letter is here synonymous with the original, radical, subject. What we find here is the symbol being displaced in its pure state, which one cannot come into contact with without being immediately caught in its play. (Lacan 1954-55, p.196)

With the letter as the center, then, the characters become peripheral. He goes on to say:

[The position of the characters] isn't fixed. Insofar as they have entered into the necessity, into the movement peculiar to the letter, they each become, in the course of successive scenes, functionally different in relation to the essential reality which it constitutes. In other words, to take this story up again in its exemplary form, for each of them the letter is his unconscious. It is his unconscious with all of its consequences, that is to say that at each point in the symbolic circuit, each of them becomes someone else. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 196)

Here, Lacan is explaining the relation between the characters and the letter, when the letter is viewed as the center. From this point of view, the letter can be identified with the unconscious and consequently with the symbolic circuit, and a character can be seen as a subject whose name is a symbol in that circuit. For a character to become functionally different in relation to the letter, the value of the symbol or symbols that represent that character must change, but the only way in which a symbol represents a character is when it's tied to his ego.

Lacan goes on to say that changes in the values of these symbols are made possible by tension and latency in the circuit of symbols, but these tensions can only be exploited by objects, and the point in time when a change takes place can't be ignored.

Human beings already have commitments which tie them together, commitments which have determined their places, names, their essences. Then along comes another discourse, other commitments, other speech.

It's quite certain that there'll be some places where they'll have to come to blows. All treaties aren't signed simultaneously. Some are contradictory. If you go to war, it is so as to know which treaty will be binding. (Lacan 1954-55, p.197)

The symbol circuit itself presents each subject with the possibility of using a symbol for speech, but in order for speech to change the value of a symbol in the symbol circuit, that symbol must be tied to an object, and the sender must be an ego. If the letter and the sender were merely symbols, then there would be no possibility of change in the symbol circuit, because there is nothing about the symbolic that allows change from within. For this reason, Lacan stops using the perspective of the letter, taking the perspective of a character as an ego instead. Only from this point of view is the letter an object that can be used for speech that can change the position of a character.

This letter, this speech addressed to the Queen by someone, the duke de S., to whom is it truly addressed? As soon as it is speech, it may have several different functions. It has the function of a certain pact, of a certain trust. It doesn't matter whether it is about the duke's love or about a plot against the security of the State, or even about a banality. There it is, disguised in a kind of presence-absence. There it is, but it isn't there, it only has its own value in relation to everything it threatens, to everything it violates, to everything it flouts, to everything it places in danger or in suspense. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 198)

From the perspective of a character as an ego, the letter is an object, but its value doesn't depend solely on the contents of the letter and to whom it is addressed. The holder of the letter at the time in question must also be considered, both because the current holder will determine the ways in which the letter may be used to change the value of a symbol in the symbol circuit, and because neither the sender nor the time can be neglected in cases where speech changes the value of a symbol.

Lacan calls the letter a presence-absence because when the letter is out of the sight of a given ego, it's no longer an object to that ego, but the symbol attached to the letter allows that character to continue to think of it as an object that exists.

Lacan takes the point of view of several of the characters' egos, each in their turn, examining the ways in which each character recognizes the letter's potential to turn him into someone else were it to be used for speech, either by that character or by some other character. Looking at things this way, the most important questions are, *how does one hide this letter, how does one find it, how can one make use of the letter without revealing it, and what would happen if the person who has it were to reveal it.* Lacan speculates about what might happen if the letter were revealed, suggesting that this wouldn't benefit any of the characters. He considers the possible use of the letter for blackmail, but concludes that the fate of the letter is to be passed around, stolen and re-stolen, while creating only temporary changes in the positions of the characters.

The minister is able to steal the letter because of several factors: he notices that the queen is nervous, he sees the letter in plain sight, and he distracts the other people in the room while he replaces the letter with a similar-looking one he happened to have on him, while the Queen

watches but can do nothing. And these are also the conditions for speech: first recognizing the importance of the symbol, then distraction, then speech using an object that is connected to the symbol. The same thing happens when Dupin re-steals the letter, but these are not the details Lacan focuses on. Instead, he says things like:

In the end, the intolerable nature of the pressure constituted by the letter is due to the fact that the minister has the same attitude as the Queen in relation to the letter—he doesn't speak of it. And he doesn't speak of it because he can no more speak of it than she can. And simply from the fact that he cannot speak of it he finds himself in the course of the second scene in the same position as the Queen, and he won't be able to do any-thing other than let himself be dispossessed of it. This is

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not due to the ingenuity of Dupin, but to the structure of things. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 201)

Through taking the perspectives of the various characters as objects, Lacan is brought back to seeing the letter, as a symbol, as the true center. But it is not this return to the symbol's perspective that is important. What's important is how he arrived back at this point, how the perspective of an object implies the need for the perspective of a symbol because it is the relation between symbols that determines what can be said and the effect it will have, and how the perspective of a symbol implies the need for the perspective of an object because characters are only distinguished by the connection between their egos and various symbols, and because no symbol can be changed from within the symbolic. It's by following these implications, and by taking various objects and symbols as the center of view, that Lacan is able to give an account of the story. But the technique that he uses is the real lesson he's trying to teach.

Now let me move on to Lacan's account of desire in *Seminar II*. Lacan begins by talking about *being*, where the inauguration of being is the same event as the first naming, except that it is described in terms of desire, being, and lack, instead of in terms of speech, symbols, and objects.

The first naming, when considered as speech, allows an ego to have a non-narcissistic relation with other objects because it can now distinguish itself from them, and it also allows egos and other objects to be persistent and to mark time. But this first naming, when considered as the inauguration of being, can be seen from a different angle: instead of allowing objects to be periodic, it creates the lack of each named object not only when the object is absent but also when it is present, because the lack is the symbol, and a symbol isn't the sort of thing that can be cancelled by the presence of an object. This inauguration of being, though, does not create consciousness even though it creates identity for the subject.

In short, there is a confusion between the capacity to erect a fundamental distress whereby being arises as presence from a background of absence, and what we

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commonly call the capacity for consciousness, for becoming aware, which is only a neutral and abstract, and even abstracted, form of the totality of the possible mirages.

Relations between human beings are really established before one gets to the domain of consciousness. It is desire which achieves the primitive structuration of the human world, desire as unconscious. In this respect, we must appraise Freud's advance. (Lacan 1945-55, p. 224)

So the first naming explains why being, presence, and absence come about at the same moment. Presence and absence imply one another because a named object can exist with or without being perceived, though absence co-exists with presence because the presence of a named object does not change the fact that the name continues to represent the object as if it were absent. Being comes about not just because an ego can now distinguish itself from other objects through a symbol, but also because the symbol necessarily does more than just allow an ego to distinguish itself. It also implies that the ego could go away but the symbol could remain, and that the symbol could exist or have existed independently of the ego, and it is the symbol without the ego that Lacan calls being.

Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that but lack of being whereby the being exists. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 223)

So being, desire, and lack are very closely connected. If being is the subject as a symbol, which is neither present nor absent but simply opposes other symbols, then desire is the relation of this symbol to the lack which it denotes when it is more than just a pure symbol, that is, when it is taken to be the name of an object. If there were no objects, then being and desire would be identical, and lack would have no meaning. As I will show, this is how Lacan explains desire beyond the pleasure principle.

But let me stress that the first naming and the creation of being along with presence and absence are in fact the same event described in two ways. As a naming, the event was simply a case of speech from the voice of no one, allowing egos to distinguish themselves from other objects and allowing objects to persist through names. In terms of being and desire, the ability of the ego to distinguish itself, made possible by its being attached to a symbol, also has the consequence of allowing the symbol to exist without the ego. Because it is the symbol which creates this possibility, the existence of a symbol is synonymous with lack, except when only symbols exist, in which case there is no lack and the symbol only stands for itself, and is called being.

It is necessary for me to discuss desire in terms of being and lack because, rather than presenting desire as speech, Lacan presents speech as desire. Before discussing desire beyond the pleasure principle, Lacan discusses ordinary desire, which takes the form of speech, though this speech is more likely to be a dream or a symptom than an ordinary utterance. This discussion is useful in its own right, but it also serves as a lead-in to the discussion of *Oedipus at Colonus*. When Lacan is discussing desire as speech, he uses the same technique of inferring symbols from objects that he uses in *The Purloined Letter*. He begins by saying that this desire is distinct from need, and is not the desire for an object.

[W]hat is important is to teach the subject to name, to articulate, to bring this desire into existence, this desire which, quite literally, is on this side of existence, which is why it insists. If desire doesn't dare to speak its name, it's because the subject hasn't yet caused this name to come forth.

That the subject should come to recognise and to name his desire, that is the efficacious action of analysis. But it isn't a question of recognising something which would be entirely given, ready to be coopted. In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world. He introduces presence as such, and by the same token, hollows out absence as such. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 228-229)

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Lacan equates naming desire with bringing it into existence, but he also mentions desire whose name has not come forth. This isn't a paradox, it's just that censorship can prevent desire from actually being articulated, or distort it into some other symbol, which will still be desire. Obviously Lacan is being careful to define desire so that dreams and symptoms can be seen as the articulation of desire.

Indeed, for Lacan, it's the psychoanalytic fact that dreams and symptoms articulate desire which proves that desire can't be desire for an object. In ordinary circumstances, however, it is easy to suppose that desire is the ego's desire for an object, and so Lacan frequently warns against making this mistake. One thing he points out in order to demonstrate that desire is not desire for an object is the fact that desire is permanent and doesn't depend on having or not having the apparent object of desire.

The Freudian experience [...] starts by postulating a world of desire. It postulates it prior to any kind of experience, prior to any considerations concerning the world of appearances and the world of essences. Desire is instituted within the Freudian world in which our experience unfolds, it constitutes it, and at no point in time, not even in the most insignificant of our manoeuvres in this experience of ours, can it be erased.

The Freudian world isn't a world of things, it isn't a world of being, it is a world of desire as such. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 222)

Obviously the permanent nature of desire is completely at odds with the transient nature of objects. If a name gives persistence to an apparent object of desire, then there is no reason to think that it is just the object that is desired. And if the object is absent from view but the desire continues, then desire is even further removed from the object.

And because desire is the articulation of a symbol, desire can have nothing to do with an object, except that the symbol spoken as desire can be the name of an object, or can have some relation to the name of an object. For Lacan, speaking

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a symbol as the name of an object is never naming desire. In order to name desire, something must happen that allows the symbol to be used as a symbol:

Desire always becomes manifest at the joint of speech, where it makes its appearance, its sudden emergence, its surge forwards. Desire emerges just as it becomes embodied in speech, it emerges with symbolism. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 234)

Lacan also uses the term 'joint' to describe the condition for the naming of an object (on page 170), and the only example he gives of the emergence of the symbol is the dream of Irma's injection, where the emergence was made possible by the dissolution of the ego and the fragmentation of objects. It is important to keep in mind the sudden, delirious nature of the emergence of the symbol, in order to avoid the impression that naming desire is an ordinary activity.

Here one must be aware of the difference between desire for a symbol in the presence of objects, and desire when there are no objects at all, which Lacan equates with desire beyond the pleasure principle. Ordinary desire as speech can take place in the presence of objects even though the desire has nothing to do with the objects, and these objects can still be seen as giving temporality to desire. In the case where there are no objects at all, there is no measure of time because symbols are timeless, and this is the reason why Lacan uses the quote from *Oedipus at Colonus*, 'Am I made man in the hour when I cease to be?', to explain desire beyond the pleasure principle. Lacan draws a connection between the first naming, which creates being along with desire, and takes place before time can be measured, and desire beyond the pleasure principle, which comes about when time has ended for the subject.

Before his birth his parents were told these things which required that he be hurled towards his destiny, that is that no sooner was he born, he be exposed hung by a foot. It is with this initial act that he begins to realise his destiny. So everything is written from the start,

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and unfolds right up to its final end, including the fact that Oedipus assumes it through his own action. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 229-230)

That is where the beyond of the pleasure principle begins. When the oracle's prophesy [*parole*] is entirely fulfilled, when the life of Oedipus has completely passed over into his destiny, what remains of Oedipus? (Lacan 1954-55, p. 230)

So the prophesy is like the first naming which creates desire along with being, and when the prophesy is fulfilled, it means the end of time for the subject, and this causes or is caused by the dissolution of the objects which have allowed time to exist up to that point. Lacan brings this out by mentioning Poe's story, *The Case of M. Valdemar*, which he recounts in a vivid fashion similar to his description of the moment in *The Dream of Irma's Injection* when objects dissolve.

[B]ut when he is awakened, M. Valdemar is no more than a disgusting liquefaction, something for which no language has a name. [...] [T]he bubble bursts and dissolves down into inanimate putrid liquid.

That is what happens in the case of Oedipus. As everything right from the start of the tragedy goes to show, Oedipus is nothing more than the scum of the earth, the refuse, a thing empty of any plausible appearance.

Oedipus at Colonus, whose being lies entirely within the word [*parole*] proffered by his destiny, makes actual the conjunction of life and death. He lives a life which is dead, which is that death which is precisely there under life. That is also where Freud's lengthy text leads us[.] (Lacan 1954-55, p.231-232)

So while desire is not desire for an object, desire can bring about the dissolution of objects for just that reason. And while objects are required for the speech which brings about being, desire, and time, it is nonetheless true that this speech also says

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that it is the fate of these objects to be secondary to desire, and finally to dissolve. So while desire is not explained by objects, it is still necessary to understand objects and their limitations in order to make sense of Lacan's account of desire, just as it is important to know the limitations of objects if one wants to understand how desire is known through speech in cases where objects are present.

At this point, Lacan has not addressed the question *to whom is the subject speaking*. In fact, the answer to this question is implicit in the passages I already presented. Lacan brings out this implicit answer when he presents his Z-shaped schema, which he uses to introduce the other with a small 'o,' and the big 'O' Other. The other is already understood because it's the ego of a particular subject, while the Other is the answer to the question *to whom is the subject speaking*.

We must distinguish two *others*, at least two--an other with a capital O, and an other with a small o, which is the ego. In the function of speech, we are concerned with the Other. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 236)

Right after drawing his schema, Lacan makes a joke which is typical of the way he talks about the symbolic. Explaining what is represented by S, he says:

S is the letter S, but it's also the subject, the analytic subject[.] (Lacan 1954-55, p. 243)

When he says that S is the letter S, he is reminding us of the peculiar nature of the symbolic, where one symbol is much like another, and each one is defined solely in terms of the other symbols. Any of them may be the subject, even the letter S.

In relation to his schema, Lacan describes the subject, the ego, and the other ego, as a way of circumscribing the Other without saying anything about it directly. It's the visual nature of the schema that makes it possible to see this implication.

This schema would not be a schema if it yielded a solution. It isn't even a mode. It's just a way of fixing out

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ideas, called for by an infirmity in our discursive capacity. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 243)

His schema allows Lacan to represent more than one point of view at the same time, in order to represent the ways in which various points of view prevent or allow a symbol to be used as a symbol. First he examines the point of view of the subject's ego speaking to some other ego.

[The subject] sees himself in *a*, and that is why he has an ego. He may believe that this ego is him, everybody is at that stage, and there is no way out of it. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 243)

Lacan draws no line connecting the subject to anything else because the fact that he sees himself in *a* means that, for the subject, there is no such thing as the point of view of the subject. While *a* is the *autre*, the *other ego*, it nevertheless represents the ego of the subject. The confusion that this might create is meant to underline the fact that the subject's ego is foreign to the subject, and that it depends on another ego for its existence.

What analysis teaches us, on the other hand, is that the ego is an absolutely fundamental form for the constitution of objects. In particular, it perceives what we call, for structural reasons, its fellow being, in the form of the specular other. This form of the other has a very close relation to the ego, which can be superimposed on it, and we write it as *a*'[or *ó* for other]. (Lacan 1954-55, p.243-244)

The subject's ego is modeled on another ego, and the constitution of objects is based on the constitution of the subject's ego. Because, fundamentally, objects depend only on each other, an exchange between two egos can have nothing to do with a symbol except insofar as it names an object, nor can such an exchange see either subject as anything but an object. Lacan says that these objects are always taken as real, meaning that there's nothing deceptive or fragmented about them.

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The imaginary gains its false reality, which nonetheless is a verified reality, starting off from the order defined by the wall of language. The ego such as we understand it, the other, the fellow being, all these imaginary things are objects. To be sure, they aren't homogeneous with moons-and we are liable to forget that all the time. But they are indeed objects, because they are named as such within an organized system, the wall of language.

When the subject talks to his fellow beings, he uses ordinary language, which holds the imaginary egos to be things which are not simply ex-sisting, but real. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 244)

But speech as Lacan describes it isn't limited to speaking about named objects. Speech can name previously unnamed objects and in some cases, symbols can be spoken when there are no objects at all. These uses of speech are what the Other represents.

Although it seems that the Other is being defined as the recipient of the speech that cannot take place between two egos, Lacan's presentation makes it seem like one might just as

well say that the ego is what prevents the subject from reaching the Other. For this reason, it is misleading to think of the Other as being derived from other ideas. Lacan obviously wants to give the Other the same status as the rest of the concepts that make up the schema.

Lacan refers to the communication between two egos as 'the wall of language' because a line drawn connecting the two egos blocks the subject from the Other. It is not this communication between egos that makes it impossible for the subject to reach the Other, however, but the fact that the subject thinks he's identical with his ego. Because of this fact, it is only possible for the subject to communicate with the Other through the subject's ego, which is why Lacan draws a line representing the point of view of the subject's ego speaking to the Other.

Lacan says that communication between the subject's ego and the Other is what takes place in analysis, on the condition that the analyst's ego is absent.

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One trains analysts so that there are subjects in whom the ego is absent. That is the ideal of analysis, which, of course, remains virtual. There is never a subject without an ego, a fully realised subject, but that in fact is what one must aim to obtain from the subject in analysis.

The analysis must aim at the passage of true speech, joining the subject to an other subject, on the other side of the wall of language. That is the final relation of the subject to a genuine Other, to the Other who gives the answer one doesn't expect, which defines the terminal point of the analysis. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 246)

Lacan doesn't say that the Other is another subject, but that the relation of the subject to a genuine Other is what can join the subject to another subject, though this communication with the Other is dependent on the condition that the other ego is absent.

But, one might ask, absent to whom? What Lacan has done with his schema is bring the ego of the analyst into consideration, not just in its potential to prevent the subject from using symbols as symbols, but also in its potential to prevent the analyst himself from recognizing that these symbols are being used as symbols. This makes the title of the seminar into sort of a joke, because at this point one understands what Lacan means by 'the ego in the technique of psychoanalysis.'

But although this shows how several of Lacan's theoretical comments relate to the practice of psychoanalysis, it should not be seen as the point of *Seminar II*. In his next lecture, the one in which he talks about Fairbairn's 'objectified analysis,' Lacan uses his notion of objects not to explain anything new, but to show how, even within Fairbairn's own system, the need can be demonstrated either for a central object that is both the ego of the analyst and the central or observing ego of the analysand, or else for something that isn't an object.

It is obvious, when one is familiar with Lacan's idea of objects, that Fairbairn's 'rejecting object' isn't merely an object.

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Basically, 'rejecting' implies a subjectification of the object. [...] [T]he notion of rejection secretly introduces the intersubjective relation, non-recognition. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 252)

For an object to reject some other object, it has to see it and it also has to reject it, because rejecting an object isn't the same as simply not seeing it. This rejecting can only be carried out by an object that sees another object as tied to a symbol, because the value of that symbol is the only thing that can determine whether or not an object rejects another object.

The most instructive thing Lacan does, though, is examine Fairbairn's idea of the multiplicity of egos.

[W]hen the author deduces from the dream the differ-entiation of this multiplicity of egos, as he puts it, the central ego is nowhere to be seen, he assumes it-the whole scene takes place in this ego, which observes it. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 254)

This is what gives Lacan the opportunity to demonstrate how one can make use of the idea of speech to imply the existence of things that are not objects. By taking note of the fact that a multiplicity of egos cannot have only one point of view, Lacan shows that the speaking subject cannot be any of them.

[T]he crucial fact is that this dream is recounted by the subject. And experience tells us that this dream isn't dreamt at any old time, nor is it addressed to no one. The dream has all the value of a direct declaration by the subject. (Lac an 1954-55, p. 255)

If one insists on the subject being an ego, then the fact that the subject recounts his dream means the subject must be a central ego which both observes and recounts the dream. And since there are no symbols that could allow more than one ego to perceive the same object, the analyst must also be the ego which observes and recounts the dream.

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If we now move on from the schema of the individual to that of the analytic situation, there's only one place to locate the analyst--precisely in the place of the *ego* who observes. [...] [I]f there's someone who observes, it is the analyst, and it is his function that he projects into this central ego, which he posits in his subject. (Lacan 1954-55, p. 254)

On the other hand, if there is no central ego, then the subject must simply be the subject recounting the dream, meaning that, because the subject is using symbols, the subject must be a symbol. As I've pointed out, Lacan isn't saying anything here that he hasn't said previously in the seminar, making his discussion of Fairbairn nothing more than an exercise in using the notion of speech and objects to imply the function of symbols. Looking at the discussion of Fairbairn in this way makes it possible to see the rest of *Seminar II* as the same sort of exercise, because all of Lacan's lectures have the same emphasis on technique that the Fairbairn lecture has.

Endnotes

¹Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, Translated by Silvana Tomaselli (New York: WW. Norton & Co" 1988.)