

Introduction to Jacques Lacan's Lecture: The Neurotic's Individual Myth

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ABSTRACT

Although the eminent French analyst, Jacques Lacan, has proclaimed himself the leader of a return to Freud, his insistence on maintaining a radical definition of the unconscious, his exclusive emphasis on a structural approach to a study of the subject, and his theoretical elaborations based on recent developments in linguistics, philosophy, and anthropology have created a storm at the center of classical psychoanalysis. Lacan's method of interpreting Freud, his views on the scientific status of psychoanalysis and on the relationship of language and truth are demonstrated in his 1953 lecture, "The Neurotic's Individual Myth."

"The Neurotic's Individual Myth," a lecture by Jacques Lacan delivered in Paris in 1953 and just republished in a French psychoanalytic review, *Ornicar?*, stands not only chronologically but ideologically and stylistically at the center of Lacan's career. Though loosely constructed and wide-ranging, the lecture displays with clarity many of the crucial methods and ideas which have proved central in his subsequent work. Moreover, the lecture provides formulations of his original theories of the mirror phase and of the dynamics of the oedipus complex. Thus, "The Neurotic's Individual Myth" serves as an especially valuable preliminary to Lacan's special reading of Freud, to his view of the status of psychoanalysis as scientific knowledge, and to his phenomenology of psychoanalytic interpretation and transference.

THE RETURN TO FREUD

While Lacan has made himself highly visible and influential on the continent of Europe, he remains somewhat less well known among Anglo-Americans, although the publication of Alan

Sheridan's translation of *Écrits* in the summer of 1977 should go far to remedy this unfamiliarity. Even on his native ground, however, Lacan's

career has been tempestuous.

First, and probably most important, as a stylist he has rejected, along with Lévi-Strauss and numerous other contemporary French intellectuals, the Cartesian handling of the French language with its emphasis on analytic and scientific clarity at the expense of complexity of perception. Lacan, like these other writers, has asserted that the traditional style dictated its own kind of conclusions which were incompatible not only with the philosophical gains initiated by the major German phenomenologists, principally Husserl and Heidegger, but also with the revolutionary doctrines of Freud and the psychoanalytic movement. The style Lacan has evolved as an appropriate vehicle for his new thought remains difficult even in French. His presentation is deliberately designed to plunge the reader or hearer into the network of intersecting meanings which for Lacan *is* the phenomenon of mind. Any demand for clarity is not only irrelevant but a betrayal of insight. By choosing to expound his ideas in a style which mocks the scientific demand for clear, serial, and falsifiable logic, he has fallen paradoxically into three distinguishable if converging traditional French cultural stances: the rebellious and persecuted *enfant terrible*, beloved of the French intelligentsia; the reformist son restoring a patrimony, in this case the true doctrines of Freud, against their defilers; and third, the messianic prophet who confidently foresees his own triumph as he becomes understood (Lacan, 1974).

The second aspect of his difficulties has derived from his dealings with the official Psychoanalytic Institute of Paris. Lacan presents himself as a restorer of Freud's teachings against those who consciously or unconsciously betray them (Lacan, 1955). His early career—medical training in Paris, a thesis subsequently published on self-punishment paranoia (Lacan, 1932)—was conventional and distinguished. He worked and taught at St. Anne's Clinic in Paris until the early 1950's when irreconcilable differences arose between the Paris Psychoanalytic

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Society headed by Marie Bonaparte, on the one hand, and Lacan and four of his colleagues on the other. Fueled by conflicts in personality, the dispute centered around the program prescribed for the training of analysts (Ehrmann, 1970); (Turkle, 1978). As a result, Lacan and his group petitioned the 18th International Psychoanalytic Congress to recognize them as a separate society, but after a hearing on the matter from which the Lacan circle was barred, the 19th Congress announced the rejection of their request. Lacan nevertheless went on to form his own *École Freudienne*, to found a journal, *Scilicet*, and to teach at the University of

Paris, where he continues to lecture.

Since this original split, there have been two schisms within the Lacan group itself. The first centered again around official recognition and resulted in the organization of the French Psychoanalytic Association, now a member of the International. It was then—1964—that Lacan founded the Freudian School of Paris, which became five years later the scene of another dispute, this time over organizational issues surrounding *la passe*, a self-authorizing procedure instituted by Lacan. Lacan's views prevailed in this debate, but as a result ten of his followers and friends left to form a new group known as the Fourth Group (Turkle, 1978).

Open hostilities between Lacan and the International Association have not abated on either side. Lacan continues to insist on a broadly-based and open training program for analysts, including not only the usual training analysis and instruction in classical analytic theory, but also study of the other arts and sciences which he considers essential to the cultivation of psychoanalytic perceptiveness. The incorporation into his own writing and lectures of insights and analogies from the fields of philosophy, literature, painting, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and mathematics exhibits dramatically Lacan's own familiarity with these fields. It also bears witness to his persistent efforts to fulfill his own responsibilities as docent. Despite the fact that his insistence on opening the training program and on loosening treatment procedures—he rejects, for instance,

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the requirement of a fifty-minute session—has caused a grave rift in French psychoanalysis, there is no doubt that Lacan has, at the same time, enriched analytic thought by the immense task of synthesis that he has undertaken.

Perhaps the deeper source of Lacan's original conflict with the Parisian Society lies, however, in his insistent attention to Freud's earlier topography of the unconscious prior to the revision of 1923 (Freud, 1923); (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1967). Freud's position, for Lacan, is central; "all the acts and manifestations which I notice in myself and do not know how to link up with the rest of my mental life must be judged as if they belonged to someone else: they are to be explained by a mental life ascribed to this other period" (Freud, 1915, p. 169). This presentation of the radical otherness of the unconscious is fundamental in the Lacanian system. Indeed, one of his designations of the unconscious is *l'Autre*, the Other. That humans may be said to know something without their own

knowledge is, according to Lacan, *the* revolutionary and original contribution of Freud to Western thought (Lacan, 1964b); (Ey, 1966). This revolutionary doctrine demands, therefore, a total reinterpretation of psychic functioning and a profound re-examination of previously held ontological postulates. Lacan contends, however, that psychoanalysis, following the example of Freud himself in his later life, is in the process of denying and, in effect, repressing this radical but correct view of the unconscious (Lacan, 1955). Lacan's return to Freud, then, is first and foremost a return to the Freudian unconscious of the earlier structural theories. In this regard, Lacan insists on the absolute differentiation between a pure doctrine of the unconscious and any of its theoretical attenuations, for instance the identification of the unconscious with instinctual drives (Lacan, 1964b).

In addition to his polemical attitude in behalf of the earlier theory of the unconscious, Lacan seizes upon and extends the implication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) that the unconscious is structured and functions like a language (Lacan, 1953a). Here again under the pose of ultra-orthodoxy, he makes

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use of Freud's expositions in a drastically original way. Given that the manifestations of the unconscious are without surcease, neither the disclosures of a patient nor the disciplined exposition of case histories by Freud himself can ever escape the distortions brought about by the interaction of these two constant human languages—those of the conscious and of the unconscious. No utterance, no matter how dry, affectless, or clear, can speak strictly of the object and not of the subject also. As Lacan states in the lecture under discussion, discursive language can never be a transparent medium. By definition, then, it cannot embody truth, which can only be *represented* by means of a figure of speech, a myth. In effect, Lacan installs an uncertainty principle at every level of the analytic process and proceeds to find in all language, however scientific in mode, traces of the repressed language of the unconscious. In this view, truth about human behavior is revealed in the fleeting and insistent manifestations of the unconscious which can be said to know the ultimate though painful reality denied to consciousness. Scientific experiment, controlled data, accumulations of evidence—all the tools of a quantitative approach to the realities of the psyche—lead to valuable *knowledge* (*le savoir*). But *truth* (*la vérité*) remains irreducibly problematic (Lacan, 1955), a kinetic matrix in which the observer or analyst inevitably becomes a participant at the instant he finds words for it.

It is at this point that Lacan's use of and esteem for Freud's case histories (apparent in the opening sections of this lecture) become intelligible. Not only are these presentations "truer" than theoretical writings which aspire to the condition of "knowledge," but they also enable the observer/reader to participate explicitly in the interpretation of both patient and analyst. Lacan's commentaries on Freud's case histories here and elsewhere are clearly grounded in attentive and detailed study of the texts, but the result is, inevitably, what he calls not *explanation* but *interpretation*, an acknowledgment that his own response is conditioned by his status as observer.

Perhaps it will be useful here to look briefly at Lacan's

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re-viewing of the Rat Man Case (**Freud, 1909**). The content and development of the case are familiar. In it Freud identifies and analyzes the etiology and symptoms of obsessional neurosis and also untangles with his characteristic thoroughness and dexterity the complicated web of information provided by the patient. Lacan's discussion of the case does not, however, address itself to the central issue of obsessional neurosis, but rather gathers a series of the supporting details provided in passing by Freud and weaves them into a new pattern. In effect, Lacan uses Freud's text as raw material for the production of a new object. Though this material will be discussed in greater detail below, let us note here that in utilizing Freud's text, Lacan highlights the shadowy role of the friend who lent money to the Rat Man's father; he reformulates the interpretation of the Rat Man's payment fantasy; and, finally, he points out some narcissistic aspects of the analytic relationship that Freud did not comment upon. In his reordering and resynthesizing of the facts, he may appear to violate the reality of the case, and indeed, there are times, especially in his elaboration of the flashiness and bravado of the Rat Man's father, when Lacan does seem to invent details rather than interpret them.

To cite another comparably free handling of a narrative, Lacan treats an episode from Goethe's autobiography in the same unrestrained fashion. Upon close comparison of the text with Lacan's commentary, one finds several shifts in small details and one major transformation: Lacan represents Goethe as experiencing an exalted sense of relief following the first kiss he gives Frederica, when, in fact, Goethe reports having a nightmare (**Goethe, 1811-1833, II, 75-76**). Lacan also touches upon another interesting fact concerning the Goethe text, namely, the Rat Man's confession that the reading of this particular episode of *Poetry and Truth* became a kind of fetish for him which he used in his masturbatory activities

(Freud, 1909, p. 204). Lacan's wry allusion to the "high value" the Rat Man placed on this text is a good example of his propensity

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for cracking inside jokes comprehensible only, in this case, to Freudian initiates.

Whereas "poetry" and "truth" were used as antonyms by Goethe, these words, for Lacan, are moving toward synonymy. What is important in these passages for Lacan does not necessarily emerge from an explanation of the text as a discursive whole, nor from an attempt to collate the narrated events with an ineluctably elusive reality (although, as he points out in the lecture, corroboration of reported facts can sometimes be useful), but rather from flashes of insight which suddenly illuminate and bring apparently insignificant details or haphazard events—like Goethe's disguises or the Rat Man's lost glasses—into focus as the interpretive key to an otherwise hopelessly disjointed schema of events. When recognized by the alert reader/analyst, the truth which is spoken by the unconscious in the interstices of conscious discourse or which is simultaneously hidden and revealed in the paradoxically revelatory medium of chance events will restore the structural continuity of that discourse or that behavior **(Lacan, 1953a)**.

Here it becomes clear that to find the "meaning" of a text requires that the analyst attune himself to the speech of the unconscious or, as Lacan sometimes called it, the "Id that speaks" (*Ça parle*). In the Lacanian sense of the term, meaning is manifest only in the act of being hidden or covered over. He links the ancient Greek definition of truth as *aletheia* **(Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 1973)** with his version of the unconscious as a kind of frontier or border that becomes known only in the act of closing itself off **(Lacan, 1964a), (1964b)**. For Lacan, Freud's text is a *support* for a meaning, a kind of pretext (pre-text) which simultaneously presents and conceals the truth. The "true" meaning of Freud's texts, as Lacan revisits them, stands in an oblique or tangential relationship to their explicit intention. In fact, as Lacan states in this lecture, the easy accessibility of the ostensible subject of a text may result in a total masking of its originality, its "dazzling clarity." While performing a close reading of Freud's texts and maintaining the basic

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structures of the first topography, Lacan, then, treats these texts as

material for interpretation and utilizes these structures as a point of departure in the building of a metapsychological edifice which, though derived from Freud and falling within what Lacan would call the Freudian field (*le champ freudien*), goes beyond the specific forms set forth and elaborated in Freud's own work.

Freud is at once the Master and the patient whose discourse must be interpreted, and, in turn, Lacan plays the same role for his listeners and readers (Bär, 1974). The hermetic quality of his own style is intended to activate in the reader the realization that the surface of the text is not only a vehicle of meaning but also its screen. Through his deliberately witty, polemical, and sometimes outrageous presentation, Lacan self-consciously attempts to introduce into his writings the free play of the unconscious. Although his style has seemed to some "precious" (Fages, 1971), "obscure" (Bär, 1974), or "like a tangled thicket" (Edelson, 1975), it is purposely developed, according to Lacan himself (1974), as a dimension of therapy and ideology. When questioned about the difficulty of his writing, he replies with the prediction that in ten years everyone will be able to understand him easily (Lacan, 1974), and, indeed, that is his aim.

Just as analysis tries to set a curative process in motion by making repressed material available to consciousness, so, by analogy, Lacan attempts to integrate the energies of the unconscious into his writing. For to try to contain scientific discourse within the confines of objectivity and traditionally defined reason is to fall victim to the ruses of repression. Lacan seeks to present truth as multilayered and paradoxical, overflowing the expressive range of conventional logic. Both as analyst-writer and as self-confessed patient, Lacan strives to recognize and represent what he considers to be the radical decentering of the human subject. His effort to find mathematical equivalents to psychoanalytic constructs and his use of topological figures such as Borromean knots to represent the nature of psychic agencies and their relationships are recent examples of his desire to integrate

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a new interpretation of scientific knowledge into psychoanalytic theorizing and discourse. His writings objectively embody the psychic multivalency which psychoanalysis should have as its end. By the instrument of his style, Lacan exhibits the ideological integrity of his theories; by the strenuous collaboration his writings demand of his readers, Lacan strives to authenticate his view of psychoanalysis and its therapeutic aims.

In returning now to Lacan's reconstruction of Freud's case history of

the Rat Man, one can observe the derivation of an entirely independent theoretical structure from the same materials which led Freud to the definition of obsessional neurosis; Lacan derives instead a theoretical account of the process by which narcissism functions in the formation of the ego.

THE MIRROR PHASE

According to Lacan (1949), the ego is the precipitate of a genetic stage he calls the mirror phase (*le stade du miroir*). His description of this sequence of psychic events is structurally intended, and it must be remembered that the term "mirror phase" is a metaphor and does not, therefore, describe an actual event. Lacan supplements Freud's formulation of narcissism with the notion of the fetalization of the infant. The birth of the human baby before the maturation of the neuromuscular systems determines, according to Lacan, a specific relationship of the child to his own image.

In the first months of life, the human infant's motor coordination and control are inferior to his visual capacity to recognize forms and to make field-form differentiations. Therefore, when presented with his own image in a mirror, the infant can recognize the image as himself and perceive it as a visual *gestalt*, although he simultaneously experiences himself internally as a fragmented and chaotic jumble of impulses and sensations. This perception of oneself *out there* as a unified whole in contrast with the internal sense of oneself as a fragmented and disordered agglomeration results in the simultaneous formation

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and alienation of the self. This paradoxical constitution of the self as exterior and in disaccord with its own reality institutes a dialectic of identity which is accompanied by an analogous dialectic of affects: a jubilant and loving recognition of oneself, on the one hand, and, on the other, the aggressive wish to destroy that same self since its apparent wholeness evokes a threatening sense of inner fragmentation and deficiency. As Lacan (1949) puts it, because of this primal lesion, man constitutes his world by his own suicide. While the formation of the self and the phenomenon of self-consciousness *unify* the subject in respect to his former state (the autoerotic stage of *le corps morcelé* or the fragmented body), they also *split* the subject in the moment of his own specular capture.

As portrayed in the mirror phase, narcissism is, then, the paradigm of a *dual* relationship which, in the Lacanian system, institutes the mode of

the imaginary (*l'imaginaire*) (Lacan, 1953b). One knows oneself as another in space; one is the other out there. But there is neither merger nor naming in this identification. While it is possible only in the context of the human psychic potential, i.e., civilization and its symbolic modes of language and law, this dual relationship does not refer to them directly. Since in its institution there is no reference to any real or symbolic existence outside it, the self's relationship to its own identity may be termed imaginary.

In addition, it must also be pointed out that as one recognizes oneself in an external mirrored image, this mirror-self is also an object in space. The specular capture of oneself in the mirror phase also institutes object relationships, not in the sense of object libido, but in the sense that to have a narcissistically cathected self-object one must posit not only recognition of self but also recognition of object. And this object, this imaginary object, as Lacan would call it, is the ego. The fact that Lacan defines the ego as an imaginary object leads him to major differences with contemporary ego psychologists (cf., Hartmann, 1950); (Rapaport, 1950) in that he does not recognize the ego as the center of the perception/consciousness system, or as an

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autonomous agency, or as the psychic representative of the reality principle. The ego, for Lacan, is a construct, an imaginary statue, the rigid mold into which man pours his alienated identity (Lacan, 1949). Although its *existence* is instituted in the mirror phase, the *form* of the ego is never fixed, and it will undergo continuous change and modification throughout the subject's life.

In accordance with Freud, Lacan views narcissistic cathexis of objects and object libido as different phenomena, but he does not view them as on a kind of see-saw balance as does Freud (1914), but rather as two quite separate but co-existing modes. Nor is this primitive narcissistic splitting or its aggressive tension ever superseded or transformed. In contrast to Kernberg (1975), Lacan (1948) insists on the persistence of these archaic narcissistic structures, especially in the psychoanalytic transference, a phenomenon he emphasizes in the present lecture and presents by the use of a series of images and figures.

As a result of the constancy and irreducible character of narcissistic structures, Lacan is able to identify a strong narcissistic component which he considers fundamental to the dynamics of analytic transference. Because of the essentially *dual* character of the analytic situation, it is

peculiarly apt to activate the narcissistic structures of the mirror phase. According to Lacan—and his statements here are confirmed by later observations by Kohut (1971)—the analyst will find himself personifying various narcissistic figures which mimic the different moments of the mirror phase. Since each of these configurations may be subject either to a positive (erotic) or negative (aggressive) affective coloration, the narcissistic transference may produce four different patterns.

The first pattern is determined by that moment of the mirror phase in which the infant recognizes the image in the mirror as himself. The emphasis here is on *likeness*, although there is no merger or coalescing of the patient with the analyst, for the image, as in the mirror, is reversed. The analyst is perceived by the patient not as identical to himself, but as a similar other,

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his counterpart, his brother (*cf.*, Kohut's [1971] twinship transference).

Lacan identifies this fraternal transference in both its positive and negative version as the basic dynamic of the Rat Man's relationship with Freud. The Rat Man opens his first session with Freud (1909) by telling him about a friend who plays the role of permissive confidant for him. Freud's assumption of this positive fraternal role facilitates the beginning of the treatment. Later the Rat Man's dream of Freud's daughter marks the development of aggressive feelings toward Freud and the displacement onto his daughter of the positive narcissistic cathexis. Lacan suggests elsewhere (1948) that in addition to being the mechanism which facilitates the inauguration of analysis, a positive narcissistic identification may also play a role in the motivation of the analyst, inasmuch as he approaches his patient with a sense of sympathetic and "discreet (discrete) fraternity."

The analyst's role as the patient's other may take two other forms, represented by Lacan in this lecture by the figures of the Master and of Death. These transference patterns are reactivated vestiges of the splitting stage of the mirror phase, representing primarily the infant's perception of *difference* between his fragmented, disordered self and the whole, unified image in the mirror. Compared with this sense of internal chaos, the reflected visual *gestalt* the infant identifies with possesses an ideal unity. Inasmuch as he identifies erotically with this idealizing reflection of himself, it will become a normative and salutary imago. The projection of this idealizing narcissistic imago onto the analyst results in his apotheosized apparition as the Master (in the Latin use of the term) or, as Lacan (1974) was later to designate it *le sujet supposé savoir* (the subject who is

supposed to know). Kohut (1971) labels this process the idealizing transference and he, like Lacan, associates it with the attribution of all wisdom, knowledge, and perfection to the analyst.

The last of the narcissistic personae the analyst may reflect is a modification of the preceding one and emerges from the

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same process of differentiation but as its aggressive avatar. The analyst appears as the aggressively invested Master: he plays master to the patient's slave (*cf.*, Lacan's references to Hegel [1807]), or, carried one step further, he personifies the absolute master, Death.

The initial silence of the analyst mimics the silence of the image in the mirror whose voiceless look seems menacing in its refusal of response and recognition. As Lacan says (1958a), the analyst "plays dead" (*il joue le mort*). The use of the word *mort* here is a characteristic example of Lacanian punning, for it means not only "the dead man," but is also the French term used in bridge for "dummy" which reverberates off the English word "dumb" or mute. so the analyst plays the dead man (the dummy), and his strategical silence depicts and evokes the subject's sense of his own emptiness, his annihilation in and through the formation of his own identity. Lacan's analysis of this phenomenon parallels Rank's (1914) explanation of the myth of the "double," according to which confrontation with one's counterpart, twin, or double is universally interpreted as a meeting with one's own death.

Since the formation of the self is realized only in this dialectic of being and death, and since the relationship with oneself constitutes the archetype of all dual relationships, death is, as Lacan states in this lecture, an imagined and imaginary presence in all our dealings with ourselves and with others. Generosity could not exist without hostility, nor love without hate, just as an analytic cure is impossible without the presence of aggression (Lacan, 1964a). For, according to Lacan, one of the fundamental mechanisms of analysis, resistance, is a manifestation of the aggressive component of the ego.

The formation of the ego, the third movement in the mirror phase, is, in a sense, a strategy of defense meant to block the anxious apprehension of narcissistic lesion or splitting. Repeating the primal pattern of the aggressive formation of the ego in response to the perception of one's double (death), the patient will successively produce the various forms of his ego,

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this imaginary object, in response to the pressure of the tacit presence of the other (the analyst as death) until, frustrated by his failure to entice the analyst into confirming his identity in any of these stultified and partial images of himself, the patient recognizes that his ego represents in itself a kind of pathological symptom, a mere effigy, a self constructed *for* another and, indeed, as another (Lacan, 1953a). The process in psychoanalysis by which the subject unveils the emptiness of his own identity is represented by Lacan at the end of this lecture as the central moral, even spiritual, impetus of analysis. Like Goethe looking into the dark abyss of death and calling out "More light!," the patient and the analyst both come to their encounter with the faith that the willingness to confront one's own annihilation without fear is the only means of achieving freedom from psychic bondage.

Another point of this lecture is also based on the persistence of narcissistic structures throughout psychic life. Lacan uses this principle to illuminate the pivotal point between the narcissistic and the oedipal phases and to posit the quadrilateral, as opposed to the triangular, structure of the oedipus complex.

As Lacan (1948) sets forth in another essay, while the resolution of the oedipus complex is dependent on the child's identification with the parent of the same sex, this identification with his rival is not explicable solely on the grounds of castration fears but only if it is conceived of as being preceded by a primary identification (mirror phase) which structures the subject himself as his own rival. The aggressive tension of this essentially narcissistic rivalry is pacified by oedipal identification with the parent, but it is never neutralized. Lacan utilizes this persistence of the narcissistic component in oedipal identification to explain the four-sided figure which emerges in the case of the Rat Man. The parent is perceived as being split, like the self, into two beings—one reflecting the child's aggressive identification with him and the other, the idealizing identification. The oedipal quadrangle is, however, like all psychic structures, overdetermined and may be the result not only of the persistence

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of a narcissistic structure in the oedipal situation, but may also be the result of a neurotic failure to resolve one aspect of the oedipus complex. This neurotic splitting of the oedipal parent, as it is here portrayed by Lacan, is subtended by his particular characterization of the oedipal myth.

THE NAME-OF-THE-FATHER

The mythic, oedipal father is called by Lacan *le Nom-du-Père*, the Name-of-the-Father. Unfortunately again, some of the connotations of this term are lost in translation for, in French, *nom*, meaning "name," is homonymic with *non*, meaning "no." The father of the oedipus complex is not a person but a conjunction of symbols representing the normalizing process by which the child is initiated into the civilized world of law and language. This normalizing process is accomplished by the introduction of a prohibition into the child's world by imposing on him a *no*, similar to the prohibitions imposed by the God of Judeo-Christian religion (Thou shalt not ...) whose existence is recalled and echoed, with a hint of facetiousness, in the appellation, Name-of-the-Father. This prohibition, this "no" which, it must be remembered, is a mythic negative representing an endless array of possible actualizations, similar to the dialectical institution of the self, inaugurates, while simultaneously expressing, the perception of a lack, primarily the missing, castrated penis (Lacan, 1958b). The child responds with anxiety and guilt to this perception, which he tries to overcome by denial and by an attempt at mastery. The onset of the oedipus complex is indissolubly linked, therefore, with primal repression and the acquisition of language by the child.

The structural and affective politics of the oedipus complex link the child to the world by means of an unpayable debt (emphasized in the Rat Man case) in a new mode of relationship which Lacan calls the symbolic (*le symbolique*). The world and its incarnation in the law (*no*) introduce a third pole into the preceding dual, narcissistic structure. Language

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and myth are substituted for the object, but only in the sense that they appear in its absence. The word can only be where the object was. The symbolic mode is instituted, then, as Lacan dramatically puts it (1953a), by the murder of the thing. The mythical phallus is a substitute for the missing penis; the Name-of-the-Father takes the place of the murdered oedipal father.

Unfortunately, this process of substitution does not proceed like an algebraic operation where x can be made to equal y by definition. The meaning of the word can never be the exact equivalent of the presence of the thing. Similarly, the symbolic father of the oedipus complex never coincides with the real father, although they are related just as the referent of a metaphor is related to its signifier. Whereas normally an operational juncture of these two elements—the symbolic and the real (*le réel*)—is

achieved in the service of adaptation to the requirements of life, the neurotic subject fails to achieve this practical conjunction. One of the symptoms of his neurosis, as Lacan points out in both the Rat Man and Goethe, will be the quadrangular structure of unconscious oedipal fantasies.

The four-sided figure is produced by the splitting of either one of the parents into a real and a symbolic self. The persona which represents the "real" father tends to appear as a debased, impoverished, or humiliated figure in comparison to his counterpart who is endowed with all the riches—in terms of wealth, power, and love—that the subject attributes to the symbolic oedipal father. Lacan interprets Goethe's play of disguises, in one of its aspects at least, as an attempt to create a debased counterpart so that the other, godlike Goethe may enjoy the fruits of Frederica's passion. In one phase of the Rat Man case, on the other hand, it is the female figure which is split, appearing in the guises of the rich woman and the poor woman. Here, the rich woman is seen as the symbolic, fearful, potentially castrating oedipal mother, while the poor woman is safe to love.

The variations of this oedipal fantasy are endless, for as Lacan explains here, although the quartet structure remains constant, its members change as life provides a succession of stand-ins for

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the real or symbolic parents. The dynamics of this quartet may also be reversed or changed as erotic or aggressive drives are brought into play.

These affective determinants regulate the phantasmic structures in another way, too, limiting the figure to four and no more than four sides. For in these individual mythic representations of the oedipal drama, if one of the parents is split into his or her erotic/aggressive or symbolic/real components, the dynamics of the oedipal rivalry require that the remaining parent be seen as a partner, accomplice, or at least as complaisant assessor to the rivalry with the other. As a result, when one parent is split, the other persists as an intact sustainer of the subject.

In summary, Lacan suggests in this lecture that the appearance of quadrilaterally structured oedipal fantasies may be the product of persistent narcissistic structures projected into the oedipal situation and/or the symptom of the neurotic subject's failure to achieve a psychic synthesis of the real parents and the symbolic oedipal parents. Even though a quadrangular oedipal configuration has not been widely recognized, it has been corroborated by the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949), and by the English analyst, R. D. Laing (1973). While Lacan's

propositions in this lecture concerning quadrangular mental structures appear to have been eclipsed in his own work by his concentration on language and semiotic systems, it is interesting to note that in his lectures delivered at Yale University (**Lacan, 1975**), he expressed the desire to break out of the metaphors of triangularity and proposed introducing a fourth term, the symptom, into his topological triad of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real.

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