



## ARTICLE

### ***A Critical Reading of "Family Complexes" by Jacques Lacan***<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** In his course "Des réponses du réel" of February 8, 1984, Jacques-Alain Miller evokes the text on "Family Complexes" by Jacques Lacan, speaking of it as "the first theory of development of Lacan" where he punctuates three essential moments (the complexes) in the development of the child. He briefly comments on it there, saying that "the sociological reference of Lacan hides the starting point of his work." The accent is put by Lacan on the fact that "the family is not natural, is not a biological fact, but a social fact," the finality of the thing being for him to be able to establish that "instincts have nothing to do inside it [the family]"—"he "speaks of the *paradoxical economy of instincts in man*." Any idea of vital dependence camouflages this dimension, J.-A. Miller continues. The thesis of Lacan is that "dependence is the subjection to the Other, this is the putting into form of the signifying of speech." That year, J.-A. Miller published this text "Family complexes" with the publisher Navarin, republishing it with the publisher Éditions du Seuil in 2001, including it in *Autres Écrits*. One only finds here a reading of the first part of "Family Complexes"; J.-A. Miller did not return to it in his course. The title of "Critical Reading" takes up a phrase of J.-A. Miller from the lesson of March 14, 1984. Catherine Bonningue.

**Key words:** Family; culture; Name-of-the-father.

**Resumen:** En su curso "Respuestas de lo real", del 8 de febrero de 1984, Jacques-Alain Miller evoca el texto Complejos familiares, de Jacques Lacan, refiriéndose al mismo como "la primera teoría del desarrollo de Lacan", en la cual escande los tres tiempos esenciales (los complejos) del desarrollo del niño. Lo comenta brevemente diciendo que "la referencia sociológica de Lacan enmascara el alcance de su trabajo". Lacan enfatiza que "la familia no es natural, no es un hecho biológico, sino un hecho social", objetivando así puede formular que "los instintos nada tienen que hacer allí". Habla de "economía paradójica de los instintos en el hombre". Cualquier idea de dependencia vital esconde esa dimensión, prosigue Jacques-Alain Miller. La tesis de Lacan es que "la dependencia y la sujeción al Otro, es una organización significativa de palabra". En ese año, Jacques-Alain Miller publicó, en Navarin, el texto de los Complejos, volviéndolo a publicar en el 2001, en Seuil, y lo incluyó en los Otros Escritos. Encontraremos aquí solo una lectura de la primera parte; Jacques-Alain Miller no volverá a ese texto en su curso semanal. El título Lectura crítica, retoma una frase de Jacques-Alain Miller de la lección del 14 de marzo de 1984. Catherine Bonningue.

**Palabras clave:** Familia; cultura; Nombre-del-padre.

### **I—A precursory text**

We are going to take an interest in the first large written work of Lacan's in psychoanalysis — which sadly cannot be found in *Écrits* precisely because it is so large. The editor thought that this text should be skipped over in the volume, which was

close to 1,000 pages, and Lacan agreed. Because of that, this text does not have an entirely official existence in the consideration of Lacan.<sup>3</sup>

At any rate, we must note that it has not received the attention that it deserves. The existence of bootlegged copies here and there — which is odd — has not brought this text the consideration it deserves.

What's more, it was given a false title — *The Family*. It is not called *The Family*, not at all. You will understand nothing in it if you use that title to orient your reading. The text was part of an *Encyclopedia*, the outline of which was sketched by the psychologist Henri Wallon. It was thanks to him that Lacan was called on — Lacan was not especially a *persona grata* — to prepare a chapter. It was Wallon who prepared the chapters: "The Family," "The School," and "The Profession." It is going a bit far to say that it is the family that Lacan took up. The true title of the text is altogether something else: "The Family complexes in the formation of the individual."

Today, one can only read this text retrospectively. There's no chance of reading it as an encyclopedia chapter, saying to oneself: I can't wait to get to the chapter on "The School." There's only one way to read it — it is there that the significance has changed —: as a precursor to the teaching of Lacan. Teaching that did not even exist at the date when he wrote it. Back then, it was a sensational synthesis of the theory of psychic development and a Freudian clinical practice. The second part called "The Family Complexes in Pathology" is an abridged Freudian clinic, done with a skill altogether extraordinary. It is to be read with care.

There, we are certainly within what will become the teaching of Lacan. You are dealing with a young psychoanalyst — a young psychiatrist and a young psychoanalyst. What really stands out is the orientation of Lacan, which allows him, in this business of the unconscious or of the history of the unconscious, to find his way appropriately. At the same time, what is most absent in the text is the concept of the unconscious itself. This is shocking. There is not any theory of the unconscious in this text. Neither is there — it is inevitable — a theory of psychoanalytic practice.

The text that preceded this, "Au-delà du principe de réalité"<sup>4</sup>, presented a draft of a phenomenology of the analytic relationship. There's none of that in this text — we have to say that this is not its essential purpose. This text is sensitive to the fact that it is not a question of speech, language, and even less of analytic discourse — but there is already a distinction quite severe between the ego and the subject. This is the point of umbilication of the teaching of Lacan.

Also lacking is what will come to Lacan by way of structuralism, Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss; all that is absent there, and for a reason. What is striking is what at the same time is put into play — the theme itself of the family, for example. There is a good direction here, which is his independence in relation to the work of Freud. This permits him finally to make the unconscious structured like a language the point of articulation in his work, something that — one says this enough — is not found in Freud.

It is not at all there, this good orientation. Right away, in taking consideration of this theme, where is the accent placed? Of course, on the fact that, as it is a phenomenon of generation, of that which concerns life, there is something of the family in animals similar to the family among men. If one isolates the family from generation itself, procreation and the necessary maintenance of a milieu for the development of children and young adults, already, with animals — it is at the beginning of the text — the social is different from strictly family matters, or the natural. And, with humans, the social is immediately characterized by the development of social relations.<sup>5</sup>

Here is someone who does not have metaphor nor metonymy and who, nevertheless, right away, rules out natural, pure instinct with humans, in simply thinking about observation, experience, psychology, and the anthropology of the time.

That sufficed for him, immediately, to exclude pure instinct from that which concerns humans and, to the contrary, to emphasize the constitutive agency of the dimension that he calls *culture* in all that has to do with humans.

Even with animals, there is a social element that is not strictly natural, but with humans, at any rate, the social takes the form of culture. Before the introduction by Lévi-Strauss of the *Elementary Structures of Kinship*<sup>6</sup>, the essential reference point of Lacan is to establish that, whenever one looks at humans — not only from the perspective of psychoanalysis —, there is no nature that is not reworked by culture in such a way that the cultural factor dominates.

That immediately leads him to speak of the paradoxical economy of instincts. To such an extent that it is not by the detour of psychoanalysis that Lacan, from the beginning, in his prepsychoanalytic orientation, isolates already the paternal function as an example even of what is not deducible from nature.

Before Lévi-Strauss, he made an allusion to the complexity of forms of kinship: “the modes of organization of this family authority, the laws of its transmission, concepts of lineage and of kinship that are joined to it, the laws of inheritance and those of succession which are combined there, and finally the intimate relationships with the laws of marriage [...]. Their interpretation must then be cleared up in the comparative facts of ethnography, of history, of law, and of social statistics.”<sup>7</sup> And all that, he says, establishes that the family is an institution.

Now, what is it all about? For one thing: to relativize the existing form of the family. One even already perceives there insight into what will become contemporary research on the history of the family. But, here, what is called cultural is in fact an *ersatz* symbolic. The concept of the symbolic is missing, but in a good way, that is to say that one senses that it is named in all kinds of ways. That one does not find need and natural instinct on the surface in humans, but that, in another dimension, which is that of culture, they are reworked, this idea is essential. Obviously, this is not yet formulated on the basis of the Other — the big Other —, he does not yet say that all messages of this so-called mental communication are formed in the place of the Other, but he already speaks, in a very clear way, of the domination of the cultural factor.

One notes as well the aspiration, which is also that of the mathemes of Lacan, to a teaching of simplicity, contrary to what one might imagine. One finds this here, since what is presented as the key to the theory of development and of psychopathology is a single concept, and only one, that of the complex. Just one concept, which is justifiably not presented as deriving from psychoanalysis, but in a generalized formula, as he expresses it, and which is a concept antithetical to that of instinct. You see there that which supports my demonstration, this point of articulation of Lacan in this containment of the unconscious, which is an external point of articulation, external to psychoanalysis itself. He defines complex essentially as a factor of culture, as the opposite of instinct, and he substitutes it for that of Freud.<sup>8</sup> It is right away, by a repudiation of Freud, that he formulates this operating concept.

What is this complex? It is a prestructure. That is what is lacking, the concept of structure. It is nevertheless that which he tries to define, in a tortuous way obviously. He tries to define it at the same time as a form, and as an activity. It is as a form that it is necessary in development, determining a dated reality, thus representing, by a fixed form, a certain reality of development — there, from the point of view of origins; and, on the other hand, as an activity, that is to say as prompting repetitions of behaviors, of lived emotions, as a certain number of experiences happen.

He gives a definition of it that is not made up only of what is at stake as unconscious. “It is this that complex defines, that it reproduces a certain reality of ambiance, and for two reasons. 1) Its form represents this reality in what is objectively distinct at a given stage of psychic development; this stage specifies its origins. 2) Its activity repeats in lived experience the reality thus fixed, each time that some

experiences occur that would demand a superior objectification of this reality; these experiences specify the conditioning of the complex."<sup>9</sup>

What is Lacan calling the objectification by the concept, to the point of saying that all complexes refer to an object? We can only understand this in the context of the whole text.

It is the idea that the real does not intervene as such in what is at stake here. It only intervenes through different forms of objectification. Put differently, when he employs the term objectification, it is with the notion that forms of objectification succeed one another and that one passes from an old form to a new form through a crisis, through conflict with a form of objectification, eventually with reference to the real.

That, which he names objectification — on the basis of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is developed in this succession of forms of objectification which follow one another by conflict and then are resolved through crisis — comes eventually to the place of symbolization. That which complex characterizes by the repetition of fixed reality, to the point of a superior objectification of reality. As much as he puts the emphasis afterwards on the fact that all objective identification demands to be communicated — one truly sees there that which is named the concept of symbolization. That appears equally difficult to understand, and it is only on the basis of what follows that we perceive the value that it has.

What gives the point of articulation now for the reopening of the unconscious is this antithesis here formulated as that of instinct and complex, which allows a contrasting of, on the one hand, the complex as knowledge — this complex has obviously a signifying status, it is the term of *knowledge* that one must put in the place of the complex —, and, on the other hand, knowledge in the conaturality of instinct, opposing the typically social character of the complex with the typicality in the species of instinct, and, finally, of opposing the stagnation with which he names complex to the rigidity of instinct. All that together denotes that, in any case, the definition of human being given, one cannot define his mind on the basis of a vital adaptation.

We immediately see that, from 1938, Lacan is already preparing an opposition to *ego psychology*, for which adaptation is precisely the master word. What is striking is that being on the right logical track, one has, before the war, in some way sketched out, all the elements that will converge on that second movement of the unconscious.

It is only in a second movement that Lacan situates the complex as unconscious, that is to say, proposes that Freud made the complex as unconscious "the cause of psychic effects not directed by consciousness, parapraxes, dreams, symptoms." We already have there, prepared, that which Lacan will later call the *formations of the unconscious*, isolated in their sequence, and we have there this radically non-instinctual complex, cultural, based on a level of objectification — objectification supported by communication, and situated by Freud as cause of these effects not directed by consciousness. We have there, already prepared, that which, in a short leap, will lead to structuralism, and will lead to *the unconscious structured like a language*.

To understand this "unconscious structured like a language" in its proper place, one must understand it as the formula that leads to this second movement of the unconscious, and about which you see that the coordinates were given there outside of the psychoanalytic experience in the strict sense.

## II—The Prestructuralism of Lacan

I came to this text on "Family Complexes" to introduce the position of psychoanalysis between mathematics and literature, which I was only sketching out, which led me to some developments apropos the *history* of psychoanalysis.<sup>10</sup> If, today,

I had to justify bringing together these two pieces, I would do so by means of this term, which is not accepted here in France — t is a foreigner here —, to situate Lacan and a few others, this term *poststructuralism*. It is the invention of an Anglo-Saxon, which permits him to bracket together some luminaries of French structuralism, and which thus puts Lacan in the company of some names found together from the heart of the sixties.

If this term of poststructuralism holds my attention, it is because it is under this sign that I am going to Canada, in May, at the invitation of a Department of Literary History to talk about, supposedly, "*Lacan dans le poststructuralism*." I warned them that I did not accept this category, but that did not discourage them.

Today, I am going to bring together the prestructuralism of Lacan, which is certainly better known than the poststructuralism, and his position towards structuralist ideology, which one might effectively qualify as the poststructuralism of Lacan, but where he does not exactly have much company. This will provide the occasion to note that which people believe they can attack Lacan with, in the literary Departments of America, namely the superiority of *grammatologic* analysis, or *deconstruction*. If this grammatological analysis is perhaps justified — and it certainly is — as regards the fabrication of theses, it is not as evident with regard to the status attributed to it in literature.

This text on "Family Complexes" is to be inscribed in the history of psychoanalysis as it is presented as punctuated in a way that one might enumerate. 1) The discovery of the unconscious. 2) Interrogation of technique. 3) The turn of the 1920's. 4) The abandonment of Freud. 5) The return to Freud.

This summary periodization is Lacan's, suspicious in the place of history, nevertheless presented in his *Écrits*. I have noted for you that one might organize this history of psychoanalysis in a shorter way, as Lacan did it later, as the history of the unconscious, whose moment of discovery ended with repression, which necessitates, gives its meaning, its situation, to the return to Freud.<sup>11</sup> It is in relation to this periodization that we are interested in the starting point of Lacan, that is to say, the starting point in the return to Freud. I proposed, and that appeared reasonable to me, that his starting point is the difference between the ego and the subject.<sup>12</sup> What follows in his teaching obliges us to situate "The Mirror Stage" as his entry point in psychoanalysis. It is from that fact in conjunction with Freud's effort in the second decade of the century, which is marked above all else by the text "On Narcissism: An Introduction"<sup>13</sup>, that one situates the ego relative to narcissism.

Regarding that, whatever the corrections that Lacan will sometimes bring to Freud on one thing or another, and he tends to do that in this text on "Family complexes" — the return to Freud does not signify the devotion to his every word —, the definition of the ego is founded on narcissism, and if one sticks with it, it was enough to deny that one has there the proper point to identify as the pivot of the analytic process. This is the point from which Lacan directs his insurrection against *Egopsychology*, which, under the pretext of supporting itself on Freud's "The Ego and the Id"<sup>14</sup>, writes off this definition of the ego as narcissistic.

It is from there that the starting point of Lacan in "The Mirror Stage," which in some way sketches — to say it in this way — the narcissistic status of the ego, was already prepared, anticipated, so as to serve as witness against psychoanalysis reinterpreted as the psychology of the ego. When Lacan begins his teaching in the 50's, he is the author of "The Mirror Stage" of 1936, and cannot believe his eyes in reading what has developed in the United States since 1945-46: the ego is taken there, in contrast, as the pivot point of the analytic process. There is thus a correspondence between what figures in "Family complexes" and what was for Lacan the subject of his first communication before the analytic community, in Marienbad, in 1936. He did not write up this communication to publish it, seemingly because of the

pique or the furor of having been cut off by the president of the session. At that time, presentations were not 20 minutes, as is the case now, but twelve minutes, and because he was not respected, we do not have this presentation. The text that is the closest to that "Mirror Stage" is not the one you have in *Écrits* which is a much later draft<sup>15</sup> — it is already a reworking —, but what appears in "Family Complexes."

The ego is not the subject, not as Lacan defines the subject in "Family Complexes," and it is necessary to distinguish them. He does it above all by maintaining the status of the subject as divided and in opposition to any unifying conception of the subject. For him, this division is not surmountable in any way. From there, it is easy to see how, later and without any difficulty, he will be able to make castration a key concept, since, in the first place, castration figures, names the division of the subject, as not being surmountable.

When one grasps the concept of castration in its construction, in its Lacanian elaboration from the beginning — he still calls it a fantasy in "The Family Complexes," lacking the concept of the symbolic —, this beginning helps us recognize the bifidity, the double character of this concept, which, on the one side, points towards the subject, and names again its division, while, on the other side, it points towards the object where it locates its loss. Later, Lacan will introduce the symbol (-) to write, very simply, castration. This symbol treats, puts itself in a series, on one side with  $\$$ , the division of the subject, and on the other side with the *petit a*, the object as lost.

One sees, from Lacan's beginning, how castration, which is not yet here, will be able to become a key concept for him. What barred Freud from accepting castration as a key concept is that he did not want to accept as definitive, as statutory, the division of the subject — obviously admitting no reconciliation, and, in all cases, not permitting to advocate this harmless oversight, this benign negligence that one calls wisdom. Thus, first, this fundamental division, and, I am going to say — we can find the passage in this text —, a division by the symptom. Second, we can find here a structure before structuralism, and at least a call to the concept of structure, which is a perspective from which to decipher — that which will appear to most people absolutely opaque — his definition of complex, at that time.

Actually, you'll be lost in this notion of complex — Lacan moreover abandoned his promotion of it —, if you do not see that it is there as an anticipation of the concept of structure. This anticipation is first presented in the obligatory reference to the social, that one finds in this text. One says that it is obligatory because it derives from the subject itself, the family. It comes from the organizer of this volume of *l'Encyclopédie*, Henry Wallon, and it comes from the ordering where the text is placed, before the school and the profession. But Lacan makes something of these obligations in paying respect to he who receives it — that which is, after all, the fate of such collections.

The emphasis put there on the social — necessary for this *Encyclopédie* — and on the cultural as being that which specifies the social for the human, a cultural which is made of sedimentations of communication, announces already the notion of symbolic by the affirmation, in all ways shocking for the reader of the time, that psychoanalysis verifies the dominance of cultural factors. It is that which leads him to a definition of the human order as such, that is to say differentiated from that which organized the relations of animal species, as "subversive to all fixity of instinct."<sup>16</sup>

It is that which justifies the call to anthropology, indeed history, which is made in this first text. These references, as those to the age of Enlightenment, have the benefit of bringing everyone together in the debate. It always has the same value of manifesting the artifice — which is after all another name of the signifier in as much as semblant —, of showing off the artifice in that which rules, regulates, constrains human existence. If there is a major point in this text, and also entirely decisive after this division of the subject, it is the denunciation of the concept of instinct regarding man, the instinct as rigid, invariable, to which one opposes, precisely by cultural

inquiry the most elementary, the infinite variations of human existence and its modes of organization.

It is as a good that study concerning the psyche is not able to objectify instincts, but only the forms immediately dominated by cultural factors, that Lacan calls, in this text, *complexes*. I earlier emphasized his expression of the “paradoxical economy of instincts.”<sup>17</sup> You will find again this intuition, certainly enriched, in celebrated passages of *Écrits*, where he takes up again the inexistence of pure need or instinct in the speaking being, in as much as, if one might even isolate it, this need would be completely reworked by demand, by the fact that the subject speaks to and addresses himself to the Other. One does not find, obviously, the tightening around the Other of the demand in this text on “Complexes,” but one already finds there the response that would permit this elaboration, namely the fundamental non-instinctual character of human appetites. That goes up to his brief analysis, basic, open to criticism, but stunning, of weaning, which first notes that, even if a function of natural appearance is at stake here, that does not, all the same, permit one to recognize what is at stake in this function which is weaning.

### III—The complex-structure

We are not surprised that Lacan gives complex a formula that he calls generalized, in comparison to the complex in the analytic sense that appears as a derived case. To give complex a generalized formula, that would be to treat complex as a structure, in the same way that, later, he will not consider that there is any structure other than analytic structure. This preparation of a generalized formula of complex, which only plays a secondary role with unconscious complex, as if it would be a question there of a partialization of the concept, in fact anticipates that which is still lacking in Lacan, namely the concept of structure.

It is all the more striking that, later, the structuralist Lacan will attribute some Freudian uncertainties to this lack of a concept of structure, but as well will find in Freud the anticipation of the Saussurian structure. We can say the same thing of Lacan, except obviously he does not have Freud’s excuse, but, even around this central lack of his argument, which is rather gripping, it is all that which, already, names and leads one to this concept of structure.

We can only orient ourselves in this definition of complex from the concept of structure. Lacan calls it a *representation*, but, in fact, this complex has two traits: fixation and repetition. Fixation of a stage of psychic development, and repetition that this complex promotes, which makes Lacan speak there of the activity of the complex — I have brought out earlier the concept of structure in Lacan in speaking of the “action of the structure”<sup>18</sup> —, which holds to that which is started, in a way sometimes at a bad time — it is even there that it is graspable —, when the reason for something, a certain type of experience, presents itself. How are we going to account for this fixation and this repetition without the concept of structure? That which is still called this concept of structure is the connection of the whole complex with an object, and without doubt it would be necessary to grasp this object from that which he calls the forms of objectification, which are, when all is said and done, forms of subjectification, since the question is of knowing at what level we find the real, by a subject, at a given moment, objectified, that is to say, communicated. There is no other definition of the object properly speaking than of “objective identification,”<sup>19</sup> of identification with an object as such, outside of the possibility of communicating it. It is that which makes of the object, finally, an objectification, and it refers from there to avatars, to the position of the subject.

What is equally striking is that the object in question is finally as well an anticipation of the object such as we know it by what follows as lost. There are many

blind windows in this text, a sort of list, a symmetric preparation, of compatibility, which certainly is a matter of psychiatric style or the manner of an encyclopedia, but, to read it in context of what follows, you must truly take it apart, to perceive that the essential manifestation of complex is the “objective deficiency with regard to a current situation.”<sup>20</sup> From this phrase, we can only retain the term of *deficiency*. That which Lacan presents us under the fixed and active aspect of complex relates each time to a deficiency. In spite of appearances, it is this deficiency that organizes what follows, the articulated sequence that Lacan proposes of psychic development. It also leads us to see that this text anticipates, by the emphasis, what is at stake in structure in the analytic sense, of its correlation with the object as deficient. Here we have, not the purified logic that Lacan will give later, but already the call to it.

You do not have the same anticipation in the immediately preceding text, “Beyond the reality principle,” even if all the digression which is the phenomenology of the analytic experience — which does not figure at all here — obviously gives suggestion of the later teaching.

A fourth anticipation, even if it is not developed, is all the same made explicit, if one knows how to read the text without busying oneself too much with the difficulties of its exposition. Lacan gives three perspectives on this deficiency in this text — first, being a relation of knowledge — second, of being a form of affective organization, and third, of being a test of the shock of the real.

Going along this way, even if that justifies itself, for the readers of the time, even if for today’s readers who would not have the orientation that I propose, the rapprochement appears a bit heteroclit. If it is a question of the object, to situate it and to identify it, to understand that knowledge is in play as well, that it is not a question of pure perception, but as well of activity at a higher level, as one imagines, and that it requires the integration of these perceptions and, at the same time, a putting into play of gnosiological mechanisms — why not be complicated —, one could admit that with regard to this object, one has some sentiments and some palpitations. If one speaks of complex, it is that one has some fixed feelings in relation to this object — test of the shock of the Real —, that after all this object, even if it is a form of objectification of the Real, might all the same surprise us. One can thus understand it at a decomposed level, but I hope that it does not escape anyone here that, once one deduces these three aspects of that which Lacan calls the objective deficiency through which the complex manifests itself, this tripartition is already that of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real.

The relation of knowledge, since it only concretizes itself in communication, is, truly, unthinkable without the symbolic dimension. This form of affective organization already supposes the position of the object as imaginary. As for the test of the shock of the real, one already finds anticipated the properly Lacanian status of the real in the word shock, which we will find for example in his expression, overhauled in his teaching, of the *pieces of the real*. Shock of the real is also already that which anticipates the real as impossible, precisely impossible to resorb the shock of. That which does not mark the real as impossible, obviously it is that the real does not make a system, and that one has a sort of point of appeal in this test of the shock of the real.

It is this that makes the prestructuralism of Lacan — a prestructuralism which lacks structure, which lacks the precision of the symbolic, which is related to the Saussurian structure — form this vague concept of culture. What is missing in this prestructuralism is the concept of the signifier. What fills the role of the signifier, and it only approaches it, and does not enable one to mark the difference with the object, is the concept of *imago*, treated in an original way by Lacan, and which will permit him to name in an undifferentiated way the object and the signifier.

To make a rapid short circuit, what marks the passage from pre- to poststructuralism? Prestructuralism is before the signifier, and poststructuralism, the good one, that is to say the only one, Lacan's, is beyond the signifier: it is the consideration of the beyond of the signifier.

#### IV—A punctuated sequence

I would like to speak a bit about this punctuated sequence that Lacan lays out. It is very simple, there are three points of punctuation: weaning, intrusion, Oedipus.

Weaning, everyone knows what that is.

Intrusion, it is under this name, this designation, and at the level of the family, that Lacan resituates his "Mirror stage." This becomes there essentially an analysis of the fraternal complex — that is what intrudes.

Regarding Oedipus, he actually tries to give reference points to this complex, first to narrate it, and also to explain and draw the consequences of its fundamental triangulation, and to situate there, between the father and the mother, this Oedipus complex, based on the castration fantasy.

The most striking thing about this sequence is, first, that if there is a question of stages, we don't find the anal stage. It is unique — even shocking — to find this absence of the Freudian reference. On the other hand, right away, one finds that the punctuations of this development only find their meaning from the Oedipus complex. Lacan, in his text on psychosis, will write that development — in as much as it has a place in psychoanalysis — only takes its signification by the retroactive effect of the Oedipus complex, namely that the earlier losses are not to be treated as pure narcissistic wounds, but that they are ordered by castration, that they take their analytic value from castration.<sup>21</sup> You already have here this approach, since Lacan — truly quickly — only articulates this development subject to its reworking — it is his term — by the Oedipus complex. There, we thus already have the beginning, in a striking way, of his thoughts regarding development, namely that it is retroactively organized by the Oedipus complex, which will be, in his conception, its conclusion.

Regarding weaning, you have a striking demonstration (which we do not need now), because we were in the habit — the bad habit —, which consisted of not rethinking the foundations of our articulations. We have a demonstration here that the function that weaning represents is not a natural function, but a cultural function. To justify that which might appear today as closer to the demands of nature, just as weaning is practiced, it is there that truly the references to anthropology and history come, as evidence to prove that, in the human species, one did all kinds of things with regard to with weaning, that one does not find a fixity comparable to that of instinct, that to the contrary it is necessary to truly say that one invented diverse forms of weaning.

One sees what these anthropological and historical references serve. They always serve to demonstrate here that there is not a relation with the object, in the sense that Lacan will later say *There is no sexual relation*. That means that it is not written in instinct, and, that being the case, there is a place for human invention, for invention in the symbolic world, precisely because, here, nothing is written.

When one says *There is no sexual relation*, one imagines that that is embodied above all — it is true — in the relation of man and woman, that there nothing is written, that is why one invents. But it is also true in all relation of man with his objects, and in as much as they come to this place that Lacan commences to work out here, his objects — we might say — of *jouissance*, he also invents a way of dealing with them.

One might regret, for the beauty of the thing, that he did not truly deal with the supposed anal stage, since what prevails there, above all else, is this human invention

which is the cloacae or sewer or the trash can, obviously many ways of making do here, the evidence itself of culture as such. Lacan proposes to define, not culture, but civilization, by the sewer — not *taste*, but *sewer*.<sup>22</sup> Civilization is what advances in the depths of the sewer. Moreover, we see this reappearing in the question of literature. Taking off from there, another idea might be born than that which maintains the tenets of this poststructuralism.

What is amusing in the text is that it is a demonstration of what today we take as given, that there is a radical difference with instinct. To read the passages that “There is nothing instinctual between the mother and the child in the human species” would help one lose fondness for the lucubrations of Bowlby who, far from restricting to nothing the part of instinct in human behavior, dreams, to the contrary, of extending it up to an age so advanced that one would well, why not, compare or model this progression on the habits of bees.

The signifier that Lacan is lacking is also the signified, since he tries to note that that which counts is not so much the fact of weaning as the “the way it is lived” by the subject, and thus the signification he will give it. As Lacan does not speak here, save from time to time, fugitively, of meaning and signification, he has recourse to this term that is, for us, deficient, of mental intention of the subject that concerns weaning, and thus, he can, by mental intention, accept it or refuse it, and this trait will mark the progression of his development. In a certain way, he neither accepts it nor refuses it completely, neither of these two directions is dominant: a mental intention, before the choice, because “the ego is not constituted.”<sup>23</sup> That dates his expression, and even mental state, but one would maneuver better if he would have had this intention of signification, which, moreover, you will find reappear in the representation itself of the graph of Lacan, as being the origin of the vector of signification. This mental intention will become the intention of signification. That which makes signification speaks to us more than mental states. It only prevents the mental state, when all is said and done, from reducing itself to that.

Again, I will remark that, in a striking way, in passing, Lacan notes that, the child is not indifferent to the human face, from its first days and even before it has visual coordination. It suffices already from this observation to exclude all thought, founded in the observation of the child, of a primary narcissism that might completely occupy the reality of its body. That it was necessary, after all, so much time to win back — it appears that one does it fugitively today —, to take notice of the opening of the primary world of the child, you have it there, in passing, already the observation. The human face already has value for the newborn. There, already, the course of Lacan is taken, that there is not a primary narcissism, and that the only conceivable narcissism is secondary narcissism, namely that which supposes the ego and its relation to the image.

What is it that makes the imago in this affair? If Lacan says, with this tranquility, the maternal breast, if this complex of weaning is articulated to the imago of the maternal breast, it is evident that he has already made the most of Melanie Klein — in 1938. The name of Melanie Klein, unless I am mistaken, only appears one time in this text, but it does not stop, already here, Lacan from taking his part in a debate that will all the same occupy the analytic movement for a long time. This also occurs later when he evokes fantasies, where he pays homage to Melanie Klein as one of those searchers who better understood the maternal origin of fantasies of dismemberment, dislocation, disembowelment, of devouring etc.

The liaison imago-complex expresses itself in this: that it is the loss of the object — to name this complex, the moment when the object is lost is chosen — that stamps the complex as such. This complex, Lacan makes it, classically, the most primitive, will go on and experience, of course, the dialectical reworking that it will undergo. But there is certainly in this text a primacy of the mother, of such a type

that, in his interpretation of the castration complex, of the fantasy of castration, it is already the maternal origin that he values.

The function of the father is truly pushed aside as effectively altogether out of the way, as outside of this fantasmatic sphere dominated by the maternal presence since weaning. That which will come later, this exceptional position of the quilting point as the presence of the Name-of-the-Father, is already announced in this text, since all human fantasy, from the castration, is taken as maternal. The function of the father appears from a completely different order, even if there is not yet a term other than *imago of the father* to qualify it.

To return to this liaison imago-complex, already the structure of meaning with Lacan is articulated to a lost object, at least in that which concerns weaning and Oedipus, since the situation of this intrusion complex — invented for the circumstance —, does not follow this in a strict way. This intrusion complex becomes more of a cork afterwards, and Lacan will extract this complex, which is a little bit forced in its place there, and motivated by a consideration purely developmental.

### **V—A conception of the totality of psychic development**

Rereading this text, I was taken by enthusiasm. That was a surprise for me to reread it as a writing of Lacan. That which was moreover quite astonishing, it is this consistency, and, more than that, that Lacan did not continue on this path, that he did not reuse the family complex all his life. He would have been able to do it, since it is truly a conception of the totality of psychic development. I will note here two points, because I don't want to be carried away by the commentary.

First, written out in full, there is the concept of propping up — the observation that it is definitively in natural functions that the drive is supported.

At this time, obviously, Lacan does not lay out the concept of drive. He only speaks of instinct, to challenge it, certainly, but he will put forward all the same that it is not the end of the world — this value —, that we must be freed from the consideration of instinct in the strict sense when we are engaged with Freud. It is one of his efforts of a return to Freud. It is articulated there in the appropriate way: "In opposing complex to instinct, we do not deny any biological foundation to complex, and in defining it by certain ideal relations," — the lack of the term symbolic makes itself felt here — "we nevertheless reread it at its material foundation. This foundation is the function that it maintains in the social group; and this biological foundation, one sees it in the vital dependence of the individual in relation to the group. While instinct has an organic *support* and is nothing other than the regulation of this in some vital function, the complex only sometimes has an organic *relation*, when it compensates for a vital insufficiency with the regulation of a social function. Such is the case with the weaning complex."<sup>24</sup> There is, to put it differently, a biological foundation of this complex, which does not hinder it from being articulated and inscribed in the symbolic.

You see here this term of *relation* make itself seen, an organic relation. If you think there of the term sexual relation, you will also do well to define it by suppleance, not of a vital insufficiency, but of an insufficiency in the symbolic, in the regulation of a function, which becomes a social fact. No objection to that for us. The term of *relation*, written by Lacan, comes precisely in the position that he would have much later of the suppleance of a lack, the question being in what way this suppleance provides that there is or there is not this relation. This is a first citation, this relation to the organic, this relation to a biological foundation, which is not altogether denied.

A second assessment — the way that Lacan adopts and challenges at the same time the death instinct, in the sense of Freud. It is there that the lack of the term of drive makes itself felt, since he honors the death instinct as a dazzling invention of Freud, that he considers it as contradictory in the terms: "that it is true that the genius

itself of Freud gives way to the prejudice of the biologist who requires that all tendencies are related to an instinct. Yet, the tendency to death, which specifies the psyche of man, is explicated in a satisfactory way by the conception that we are developing here, namely that the complex, a functional unity of this psyche, does not respond to vital functions, but to a congenital insufficiency of these functions."<sup>25</sup> We have there at the same time the adoption of the death instinct, but under the name of a tendency to death, so as to take it away from all biological foundation.

It is there again that the promotion of the concept of the symbolic will permit Lacan, in the Rome discourse, to validate, for the first time in a convincing way, the Freudian invention, in the reporting itself of the signifying chain. I will pass by the fact that Lacan went to found this vital insufficiency on Bolck, in the conception of the specific prematurity of the human infant.

This tendency to death that he endorses, if I placed it at the spot where he speaks of weaning, it is because it is there that he articulates the liaison of death and the mother. Everything that is a fantasy of death, a call to death, even to suicide — it is founded in the clinic, and Lacan will not deny this later —, as soon as it is a question of that, it is the mother, the maternal imago which comes to give logic to that. The mother rules over — it is his idea — the primitive loss, that of the breast. The maternal imago is called up again in the subject, with a variable intensity, each time — these terms are not those of Lacan's at this moment — that a *loss of jouissance* takes place.

For those who are interested, not finding much support for this in Lacan, in the theory of toxicomania, even there, he resorts to this maternal imago to explicate the form that this toxicomania can adopt, the slow poisoning of love: "slow poisoning via the mouth." This is, obviously, the mad years, of opium in the 1920's.

One sees actually, in the whole text, the maternal imago hanging over, in a Kleinian way, all connections with death. That obviously makes of the father a function of *repairing*, the term of Lacan being "a function of sublimation"<sup>26</sup> — he is going to call to mind the intra-uterine, in passing. He goes as far as supporting himself with the evidence of pediatricians that preterm infants suffer from affective deficiencies, all while keeping his distance from birth trauma. The mother is the goddess of deficiencies, and the father finds himself charged with a positive function. He relates even contemporary neuroses to the decline of the paternal imago.

Happily, he did not keep this term of intrusion complex, which is the second punctuation after weaning. In these three pages, even if Lacan never, unlike Freud, spoke of his analysis, in this section of the intrusion complex, where the devastation of an eldest child by the arrival of a younger one is defined with great finesse, one cannot stop oneself from thinking of his own familial constellation, of the status of his younger brother. On the basis of this intrusion complex, one cannot stop oneself from giving meaning to the fact that this young brother is going to become a monk.

It is in the intrusion complex, so amusing to read, that Lacan takes up again his "Mirror stage." What is the object-*imago* doing there? It is the semblable. As a result, in human social contact, it is jealousy that appears as the essential trait — that has a special place here, since this will be the grand subject of the thesis of Lagache —, the function of jealousy as the archetype of social sentiments, the mirror stage, and competition and agreement given as the vectors, the motor force of human social contact — competition with the rival and agreement with the equal.

If we want to pull this intrusion complex to pieces, we could see, first, that which it had already put in place in an obvious way of the imaginary relation with the other, and we could see something at the same time called (by the noted absence, as well, of the concept of the big Other) to make agreement beyond competition. When, in his Seminar, Lacan puts his Schema L on the board where he puts the symbolic axis in contrast with the imaginary axis, the relation to the imaginary other and the relation

to the symbolic Other, it is evident that presents the right formula of the complex of intrusion.

## VI—A reprise of the Oedipus complex

It is also worth the trouble of speaking of the way which, thirdly, he accounts for the Oedipus complex, by the castration fantasy, supporting himself on Frazer for ascertaining the universality of the prohibition of incest with the mother, and right away treating the patricide in *Totem and Taboo* as a Freudian myth, a myth and a construction destined to give value to the paternal *imago*.

It is important to see that the very fact of saying *castration fantasy* speaks to him immediately of the dominance of the mother. In this castration, it is the mother who provides the triggering factor, at the point of saying that it is not the eruption of genital desire that motivates Oedipus, but, by the anxiety that it can arise, the reactualization of the primitive maternal *imago*. As a result, castration is the defense of the ego as narcissistic towards the anxiety that reactualizes the mother. Castration is not there so much the specificity than that of being a partialization of the set of fantasies of the fragmented body. It is this that is present in the passage that I already mentioned: “the examination of these fantasies” — the fantasies of maternal origin located by Melanie Klein — “that one finds in the dreams and in certain impulses permits one to assert that they are not related to a real body at all, but to a heteroclite mannequin, to a weird doll, to a model of limbs where it is necessary to recognize the narcissistic object about which we have above evoked its origins: conditioned by the precession, with man, of imaginary forms of the body on the mastery of the body itself.”<sup>27</sup> The set of these fantasies is related to this primary prematuration, which sets up as well a value of the mother, and which makes right away of the body, not an integrated image, but an image which forms itself in some way by the sedimentation of these imaginary forms which arrived to fill in this bottomless hole that represents this initial gap.

Castration is related to the body there. Castration treated as a fantasy is nothing other than the partialization, on a special part of the body, of these fantasies, which are fundamentally always fantasies of dislocation or of dismemberment.

What is it that Lacan calls *fantasy* here? He calls fantasy that which is in fact the decomposition of the narcissistic doll. That which he calls narcissism, it is that which glues together this multiformed image, this heterogeneous image. The word *fantasy* comes to indicate the moment where, in dreams, in obsessions, in hallucinations, this glue dissolves, and this body breaks into pieces. As he treats castration as a fantasy, the fantasy of castration is attached to the election of a part of the body, special, where this dislocation and dismemberment will be concretized: “The castration fantasy is related to the same object” — that is to say this weird doll —: “its form does not depend on the sex of the subject and shows rather that it is not subjected to the formulas of educational tradition. It represents the defense that the narcissistic ego opposes to the revival of anxiety that tends to shake it up: a fit that does not cause so much the irruption of genital desire in the subject as much as the object that it reactualizes, namely the mother.”<sup>28</sup> It is a theory of castration as strictly imaginary, and which, there even, appears as partial, except that it puts all the more value in the intervention of the paternal *imago*. One finds there, in a way more convincing than in this passage, this fundamental analysis that: that, which the Freudian Oedipus puts value on, is the opposition of identification and desire; that, which Lacan retains of Oedipal identification, taken from the side of the male, is that a splitting is introduced between the object that one desires and identification. It is for that reason that genital desire is not anxiety. Anxiety comes afterwards, genital desire reactualized the mother as the fundamental object of desire, the object as such, and,

on the other hand, an other process than that of the election of the object appears on the scene, namely the identification with that which is the obstacle to the realization of this desire, that is to say, the father.

It is thus there, with Oedipus, such as he presented it, truly — his concept of desire is still a rich concept, formed from the imaginary —, the eruption of an object altogether different, which is not the major maternal object, but this object of identification that intervenes as such, in spite of and because of the obstacle that it represents for desire. This *imago* of the father is brusquely introduced there that, in itself, is all sublimation in relation to the satisfaction of desire. Lacan will later obviously give to the term of desire a much larger definition. Here, one would, after all, besides, put *jouissance* in the place of desire. But this *imago* of the father, he gives it its place deriving from sublimation, in saying truly that one is going to see it appear there, with this father, a completely other type of object than before, a type of object that is not satisfaction, but which is properly speaking ideal identification. The paternal *imago* is thus there, very classically, entrusted with this function of idealization and, it is necessary to say it, idealizing. It is there that the Name-of-the-Father is brewing.

The value of this reprise of the Oedipal complex is to make us pass from the deadly maternal other, from the semblable as other which is also deadly, to a sublimated other, which rules with that which he might have there in agreement between the subject and his existence. It is there that the lack of the concept of the big Other makes itself felt, but it is all the same named there. "This moment, in making suddenly appear the object that its position situated as obstacle to desire, shows itself in the halo of the transgression felt as dangerous; it appears to the ego at the same time as the support of its defense and the example of his triumph." Here is the important thing: "It is why this object comes normally to fill the frame of the double where the ego is identified first and by which it might still meet others."<sup>29</sup>

Put differently, it is as if it got out of this frame, and that in the place from that which was before others, the semblable, an object came to inscribe itself, to him, in a halo, triumphant, an obstacle, and at the same time an example of triumph. "It brings to the ego a security, in reinforcing this frame, but at the same time opposes itself to him as an ideal which, alternatively, exalts him and depresses him. This moment of Oedipus gives the prototype of sublimation as much by the role of the masked presence that tendency plays here, as by the form of which the object takes. The same form is sensitive in effect to each crisis where it produces, for human reality" — a Heideggerian term, translation from the time of *Dasein* —, "this condensation of which we have posed above in the enigma: it is this light of surprise that transfigures an object in dissolving its equivalences in the subject and proposing it not any more as a mode of the satisfaction of desire, but as a pole in the creations of passion. [...] A series of antinomic functions are constituted thus in the subject by the major crises of human reality, to contain the undefined virtualities of his progress" — to contain in the meaning of container.

In all of this text, Lacan exalts the paternal role, in such a way that he is ready, on occasion, to attribute to the disappearance of paternal character in the history of a subject the limits themselves of its form of objectification of the world. It is truly the fulfillment of this trajectory, up to this enigmatic sublimation, on which he hangs the realization of psychic development. With this condensation of which he poses the enigma and this light of surprise that transfigures an object in dissolving its equivalences in the subject, he proposes as a pole in the creations of passion, and, lacking the concept of the signifier as transgressing, reordering the imaginary forms, one is unable to say that he dissolves the enigma. He baptizes it, instead, *sublimation*.

As a result, the first part of this text terminates with the examination of the status of modern man towards this *imago*, studies the relativity of matriarchy and patriarchy, and above all relates contemporary neurosis, but also the emergence of

psychoanalysis, to the decline of the paternal *imago*. That leads us practically to literature.<sup>30</sup>

He then lays out the evolution of character neurosis; it is a special type of it. It is this deficiency, conforming to our conception of Oedipus, which comes to dry up the instinctual fervor so as to tare the dialectic of sublimations. Sinister godmothers put in the cradle of the neurotic; impotency and utopia imprison his ambition either because he himself smothers the creations the world expects him to bring along with him or because in the object that he proposes in his revolt, he misrecognizes his own movement.

It is signed Jacques Marie Lacan, former senior registrar in the Faculty of Medicine. There are obviously not many former senior registrars of the Faculty of Medicine who express themselves this way. I pass from the clinical part of the thing.

I was not able to deal with poststructuralism today, but I am going to give you the key to it today. The only poststructuralism is that of the object, that which leads us "beyond the signifier," to a new form, hitherto unpublished, of objective deficiency.

*Translation by Thomas Svolos.*

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<sup>1</sup> Text and notes established by Catherine Bonningue from two lessons of *L'orientation lacanienne*, II, 3, "Des réponses du réel" (March 7 and 14, 1984), teaching delivered in the context of the Département de Psychanalyse de Paris VIII. Translated from "Lecture critique des "complexes familiaux" de Jacques Lacan." *La Cause freudienne* #60 (Juin 2005), pp. 33-51. We thank the author for his gentle authorization.

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<sup>3</sup> This text on the "Family complexes" of Jacques Lacan, after appearing in *L'Encyclopédie française*, tome VII (March 1938), was first published in 1984, by Navarin éditeur, then republished in *Autres écrits*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2001, pp. 23-84.

<sup>4</sup> Lacan, J. "Au-delà du 'principe de réalité'" (1936), *Écrits*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1966, pp. 73-92.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, J. "Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu," (1938), *Autres écrits, op cit.*, p. 23: "The human species is distinguished by a singular development of social relations, which supports exceptional capacities of mental communication, and, correlatively, by a paradoxical economy of instincts that appear essentially susceptible to conversion and inversion and whose effects are only identified in a sporadic manner."

<sup>6</sup> Lévi-Strauss, C. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), Boston, Beacon Press, 1969.

<sup>7</sup> Lacan, J. "Family complexes ...". *op cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28-29: "The concept of the complex, though recently introduced,"—by Freud—"proves to be better adapted to grander objects; that is why, repudiating the support of it that the inventor of the complex believed must be found in the classical concept of instinct, we believe that, by a theoretical reversal, it is instinct that one might now be able to clarify in reference to complex."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the beginning of the lesson of March 7, which is not reproduced here.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Freud, S. "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV, London, Hogarth Press, 1957, pp. 67-104.

<sup>14</sup> Freud, S. "The Ego and the Id" (1923), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIX, London, Hogarth Press, 1961, pp. 3-68.

<sup>15</sup> Lacan, J. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function" (1949), *Écrits: A Selection*, New York, Norton, 2002, pp. 3-9.

<sup>16</sup> Lacan, J., "Les complexes familiaux...", *op cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the lesson of February 8, 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, J.-A., "Action de la structure," *Un début dans la vie*, Paris, Gallimard, Le Promeneur, 2002, pp. 57-85.

<sup>19</sup> Lacan, J., "Les complexes familiaux...", *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Lacan, J. "On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" (1959), *Écrits: A Selection*, New York, Norton, 2002, pp. 169-214.

<sup>22</sup> T.N. The resonance between the French words *gouts* 'taste' and *égout* 'sewer' is lost in the English version.

<sup>23</sup> Lacan, J. "Les complexes familiaux...", *op. Cit.*, p. 30-36.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34-35.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52-53.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60-61: "The role of the imago of the father allows itself to be glimpsed in a striking way in the formation of most great men. Its literary and moral influence in the classical era of progress, from Corneille to Proudhon, is worth being noted; and the ideologues who, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, advanced the most subversive critiques against the paternalistic family were not marked any less by it. We are not among those who are distressed by a supposed loosening of family ties. [...] But a large number of psychological effects seem to us to be a function of the social decline of the paternal imago. A decline conditioned by the recurrence in the individual of the extreme effects of social progress, a decline that marks itself above all these days in the collectivities most marked by these effects: economic concentration, political catastrophes. [...] Such that the future will follow, this decline constitutes a psychological crisis. Possibly it is with this crisis that it is necessary to relate the appearance of psychoanalysis itself. The sublime chance of genius may not be the only explanation of what happened in Vienna—at that time the center of a state which was the *melting-pot* of the most diverse familial forms, from the most archaic to the most evolved, from the last agnatic groupings of peasant slaves to the most reduced forms of petit bourgeois homes and to the most decadent forms of unstable coupling, in passing through the feudal and mercantile paternalisms—that a son of a Jewish patriarchy imagined the Oedipal complex. Be that as it may, these are the forms of neurosis dominant at the end of the last century which reveal that they were intimately dependant on the conditions of the family."