

Aetiological Vignettes of Obsessional and Hysterical Desire

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In exploring the underlying dynamics and structure of the obsessional's desire, Lacan, in the previous chapter, reached the crucial point that the obsessional subject faces a compulsive dual relationship with the desire of the Other. The subject impulsively looks for his desire in the Other's desire while destroying the Other and himself by endless negative thinking, "undesirable acts...and exorcistic rituals," (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, 281). The subject is caught in a double bind of inevitable lack within himself and the Other; therefore, his insistent demand conflates with his desire to destroy the Other's desire. The secret behind such a contradiction is the sustenance of the subject's desire. In analysis, the subject plays out such theatre around the analyst, elevating him to the Other and a demigod. Lacan recommends against this treatment path that allows an analysand in a fantasy-based vortex of identification with the analyst. In topological terms, Lacan articulates his theoretical view by referring to the upper line in his graph of desire—a signifying line structured like a language (castration à *jouissance*). It is like a phrase that the subject cannot communicate. The analyst needs to enable the obsessional subject to articulate this phrase. Suggesting that neurosis occupies the whole subject, Lacan emphasizes that the obsessional neurosis is not an object or a parasite foreign entity to the subject's personality but an underlying structure that shows itself through his thinking and behaviour. The obsessional cannot escape from his compulsive thoughts, as the excessive brooding brings in his *jouissance*, "obsession is certainly a mental phenomenon that interferes with thought, yet obsessions are always thoughts of *jouissance*," (Soler, 2009, 175). The obsessional neurosis reveals itself through multiple symptoms or signifiers with their signified effects. In other words, the signifiers are reducible to their signifying traces. The structure of obsessional neurosis occupies the entire personality of the subject, choosing his behaviour always in concurrence with the Other, as the obsessional neurosis, by definition, delineates "a way of handling the inner drive by ascribing it to the Other." (Verhaeghe, 2000, 147)

Compulsive behaviour has the structure of a language. Everything in an obsessional speech and action, from the discourse to a mere non-verbal gesture, reveals signifiers. As far as it can be called a signifier, a plain gesture presents the whole history of the subject. Lacan compares the gesture to the French epic song, *the Song of Roland*, an epic song during the war between Christians and Muslims. Roland died of the non-stop blowing of his horn. This is a gesture with a signifying function.

It's ultimately speech, if you will. The sum of the neurotic's behaviour presents itself like speech, and even like full speech, in the sense in which

we saw its original mode in the engagement in the form of a discourse. It's full, but entirely cryptographic speech, unknown to the subject as to its sense, even though he pronounces it with all his being. (Ibid, 450)

Lacan argues that the full speech stays in the symbolic register and reveals the truth about the subject and his desire. This kind of 'cryptogenic' speech lies in the unconscious and stays beyond the conscious grasp of the subject. It is unconscious because it is the speech of a barred subject $\$$. That is a speech that in and of itself originates from its locus, the Other. Here, our unconscious, the Other, receives our demand. We are unaware of something in it: the enigmatic desire between the Other as the locus of speech and the Other as flesh, where the satisfaction of our demand lies. The subject is something other than what we call in English simply the *self*. This barred subject is subordinated to the Other as a locus of speech and the Other as 'itself'. "This is the subject who is born at the moment when the human individual arises in the conditions of speech, and insofar, there, as it's marked by the Other, itself conditioned and marked by the conditions of speech," (Ibid, 451). Since the Other doesn't respond to the subject's demand, the subject reflects his fundamental constituting lack in relationship to his demand—this is what Lacan names the object petit *a*. The Other, which listens but does not respond, makes the subject confront its demand in signifiers. This is a pattern that the analyst, like psychiatrists, repeats in the analytic sessions—the analyst (the Other or locus of speech) listens but prefers silence by refusing to respond. That part object (breast, gaze, voice, etc.) is an object that always features its underlying truth, which is its constitutive lack, loss and void. This is the cause object of desire and the object of drive that has a vital role in fantasy, where this object reveals its imaginary aspect. The object of the drive is the loss of the object. In other words, the drive circles around the loss and cut of the object *a*. The drive is not concerned with the object itself but with a compulsive repetition of its presence. Please read the full paper: [Sydney Lacan Study and Reading Network](#)