

A CALCULUS OF CONVERGENCE¹

Nathalie Charraud

This session from the treatment of a young woman allows a clear distinction to be made between the main points which preceded the statement proffered by the analyst, and the effects of the interpretation.

Rejection

The analysand starts the session by telling me that she can't continue coming, because it's her friend who pays for the sessions. She doesn't want this situation to carry on any more—she has to get rid of this bloke. The bloke in question is living with another woman, and she has a position of 'mistress'.

At a second point in the session she tells me a dream she had the previous night—it is as follows: *She is going down a corridor which is straight, and has a high ceiling. This corridor gives out onto a desert. It's dreadfully hot, she's stifling.* She wakes up, very much wanting to vomit. This leads her to the washbasin where, however, she will not vomit. But she is surprised by this nightmare, because never before has one of her dreams given rise to such a violent physical reaction.

The third point in the session concerns her delicate situation with regard to her 'papers'. With a foreign passport, she needs a work permit in order to be able to stay in France. She's not short of job-offers, having gained the necessary qualifications for her work, but she can't bear the idea of going to the Prefecture to make this request for a permit, and has asked a lawyer to do it in her place. The lawyer is taking plenty of money from her, but with no result. What she wouldn't be able to bear—but what she feels will happen—is that if she goes to the Prefecture herself she will be confronted with a refusal. This state of affairs has already arisen on a number of occasions, at the times of her previous visits to Paris. Each time she had left, because she was setting about the task of putting her papers in order badly.

It's at this moment that I intervene, saying: 'there's rejection'.²

This term 'rejection' came to me through what I knew of the patient's life. Originating from a family which was very orthodox in its beliefs, she was destined—as were the other daughters—to marry someone from her own faith. While waiting for this to happen, she was

supposed to devote herself to reading the Bible. She was forbidden to continue her studies, and to sit for the *baccalauréat*. Wanting—in spite of everything—to continue with her studies, she had endured some extremely violent conflicts with her parents. She left them at the age of eighteen to set herself up, finally, in the United States. She sees herself as the black sheep of the family, excluded from the circle of her own people.

However, after the session was over, I perceived that this signifier 'rejection' carries a particular weight,³ from the fact that it was placed at the centre of the knot made up from the three preceding phrases. For her it was a matter of leaving both her boyfriend and me; secondly, in her dream, of vomiting something up; and thirdly, of encountering a refusal from someone at the Prefecture. She leaves, she is excluded, she vomits. These significations turn about a central signification, which one might describe as a point of convergence of the terms that have followed one another: that of rejection. This point of convergence has two aspects: a signifying aspect, which can be pinpointed by the term rejection, and a real aspect, that of the oral object which was looming up in the nightmare, and which she fled by means of waking up and wanting to vomit.

If I had interpreted with something more precise on the level of meaning—'you fear a rejection', or 'you're producing a rejection', or even 'there's a rejection'—I think that the real dimension of the object would have been much more obscured. 'There's rejection' kept open all the ambiguities, whilst not brushing aside the object of rejection. In particular, my statement played on the equivocation introduced by the terms which arranged themselves around this signifying term. Consequently, after a silence, she starts with a question: 'Rejection? On whose part?' I reply to her with a 'Yes?' of encouragement, and in the remainder of the session what one can take to be the effects of the interpretation unfold.

The first is an effect of remembering. Important material is brought into the session about the way in which she left at the time of the rejection of her family. It is not important to go into this here. A second effect, which was a consequence of this remembering, is a reactualisation by means of affect. This second part of the session was, in fact, centred around a kind of actualisation or staging, around the themes of her nightmare and of recurrent elements in her life. Very agitated by this evocation of the rejection of her father—labelled as 'definitive'—she sat up on the couch, explaining that she was suffocating (as in her

dream) and that she wanted to leave. She said that she no longer knew what to hang on to but, noticing a print on the wall of my consulting room, that she caught onto it, and that this allowed her to lie down again. She had chosen her studies in the same way, she continued. Some posters had appealed to her, and this had led her towards her profession. So we have here, successively, a 'bringing into the present' of the unbearable of the real aroused by the dream (feeling ill); the imaginary solution—recurrent in her life—of leaving; and the catching hold of a symbolic element—a poster—of which the content is relatively unimportant, but which allows her to return to the signifying chain.

The question arises of whether to explain—as I have done here—the signifying term which seems to produce a point of convergence, and of whether or not to offer this to the analysand. Consider, for instance, the case in which a signifier is clearly set out, and around which the analysand attentively develops her associations. In such a case it's not worth adding any more; it's more a question of cutting, of lightening the discourse... In other cases, the central signifier is in the position of $S(A)$, which designates the lack in the Other, and which wants at the same time to fill it in. To bring this to the attention of the analysand risks encouraging the suturing tendency. The same holds for the phallic signification which underlies every discourse. A joke or play on words here limits the interpretation to this phallic signification and leads, it seems to me, towards a complicity in the analytical relation. The signifier 'rejection', in the case of my analysand, is clearly a master signifier, which represents her in the vicinity of a certain number of other signifiers, S_2 (her family, the Prefecture, various consulates and embassies). But it isn't reducible to this function. It also designates the gap between S_1 and S_2 , because it's attached to the oral drive, and sticks itself against the place of the object. This double function of the signifier 'rejection' will come into play in what I want to put forward now—that this intervention possesses the central characteristics of an interpretation.

Meeting with the desire of the analyst

In his abstract of his *Ethics Seminar*, Lacan provides us with some sound benchmarks regarding what he calls 'reasoned interpretation',

as opposed to 'wild interpretation', or the 'spontaneous interpretation' made by the dream in the dream-work.⁴ (Lacan 1984). His commentary was produced in relation to dreaming, but it seems to me equally true applied to interpretation in general. 'Reasoned interpretation can do no better than to have appear the weakness that the phrase denotes'. Deciphering 'shows a defect of signification, and it's in no other way that it achieves the connotation of a desire'. 'Anxiety breaks up sleep when the dream is about to lead onto the real of what is desired.' (This is particularly verified in the dream of my patient.)

In thinking, after the event, about this interpretation, it seemed to me to indicate something of the 'real object of the desired' of this analysand. This object demonstrates its oral component in the dream reported here, an aspect which had already appeared in the preceding sessions. The 'stifling' (when confronted with the scorching desert) is translated—by the intermediary of the anxiety—into 'wanting to vomit', which shows that this desert emptiness (which is encountered once again in 'I don't know what to catch on to') designates equally well the proximity of the oral object that is to be rejected, to be vomited out. Lacking the signifier—too full of the object. It's another nourishment to which she aspires, and this is just as recurrent in her discourse. The 'lack of air' is correlative to a disgust at 'too much'. (She repeatedly says that she has made too many efforts in her life. She commented a while before that she has the impression she's 'swelling up'.)

The 'defect of signification' is found in the equivocation, the logical functioning, around the fact of knowing who rejects whom, or what.

The 'weakness' of the discourse is approached through the term 'rejection', and the effects of the statement 'there's rejection' seem to me explicable as effects of displacement—but not of metonymic displacements. A sliding is operative in the very weakness of the discourse, as it becomes caught up—a little further on—in the spiral of meaning which itself turns about a hole occupied by the object. That is to say, a new clasping, a new loop, can be noticed in the appearance of the material which is accompanied by affect in the actual session.

It follows from the hypothesis of the phantasy as an axiom for meaning that these spirals all roll parallel to the same initial circle, and that they are all consequences which follow from the statement of the phrase of the phantasy. An Antigone of modern times, with her will to educate herself against her father's diktat, having recourse to a law other than that of the father—a law more in keeping with our times; but actually, it's Iphigenia with whom she compares herself, even from

the moment of the preliminary interviews. Her ideal image is certainly that of the emancipated woman, yet her place in the phantasy is that of the sacrificed daughter. Another young woman that she knew was in the same situation, and had obtained, by judicial means, and after a judgement had been given in her favour, the right to sit for her *baccalauréat*, against the wishes of her parents. My analysand told me that she hadn't wanted to follow this pathway, that she hadn't wanted to drag her father through the law courts. Something about the desire of the father had had to be protected. She won't oppose another law to that of her father, but will make herself into a deadbeat, the object of rejection.

Proof already existed that—on the father's part—he was ready to crush all the gifts and inclinations of his children, in order for everything to remain the same, and to follow tradition, in conformity with the sacred texts. The dimension of eternity—in which the paternal phantasy is situated, and to which the daughter responds with the phantasy of being the victim of a sacrifice—was evident. But in this beginning of the treatment, it wasn't practicable to make the phantasy more precise.

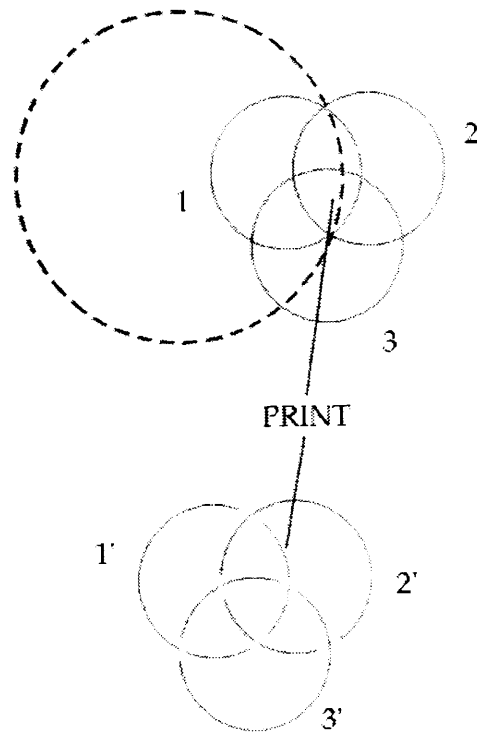
To sum up, I can say that I am putting forward this intervention—after the event—as possessing the status of an interpretation, by virtue of the fact that the point of convergence designated in it was not something purely on the level of semblance, on the level of the symbolic. The term indicated at the same time this terrain of the object, a 'weakness in the phrase', and was able to generate, as a result, something in the nature of a 'going beyond'—at any rate, a suspension of meaning. It's this suspension which can be seen in the first reaction of the analysand which is, textually, a double question: 'Rejection? On whose part?' These interrogations cut through the assertive style, which was more usually hers.

There was this going beyond: being at an end-point, and herself being stuck in this story of the Prefecture, my intervention had led her, through her recall of paternal rejection, to the memory of the fortuitous meetings (of images, as with the print in my consulting room) which had determined her choice of profession. Her profession had allowed her to obtain job contracts relatively easily, and in the intervals between contracts she played with her position of being 'deadbeat', 'left over' material. This remembering, which had marked the taking up again of the signifying chain, had not been brought about by the intermediary of a signifying association, but by encountering a detail

in the consulting room of the analyst, a detail in the form of the print, which stuck out like a sore thumb within the suspension of meaning.

The effects of interpretation are incalculable, Lacan said, because they concern *jouissance*. And, in fact, it was unforeseeable that it should have been by means of the print, of the look, that the patient would recapture the signifying chain. As an interpretation, my intervention was shown to revolve around the scorched earth, the desert of *jouissance*. But that was not immediately clear to me at the time. Rather, I was only vaguely reckoning on the possibility that she would start speaking again—in relation to rejection—about her father, as indeed she did. But the effect went well beyond this 'expectation' because, from the father's rejection, she passed, she traversed, an empty zone, where only the presence of the analyst—operating as a semblance of the object *a*—could support her.⁵ A 'nothing' on the side of the analyst, a print, had been enough for this revival, a relaunching, but not in just any old way, since what was involved designated a crucial moment in her history: the choice of her line of work.

The matheme which guided me in these developments, and which inspired the expression 'convergence' in the title of this paper, is the schema of the flattening out of the Borromean knot, as Lacan presented it at the time of his growing interest in knots.⁶ During this period Lacan utilised the Borromean knot as a means of representing something of which it is difficult to conceive: convergence—in the topological sense of this term—defined by means of the notion of a filter.⁷ What is a filter? You can represent it as a family of sets, such that successive intersections within the family give something smaller and smaller, something more and more precise. To say that the filter is convergent is equivalent to saying that the limit of this process generates a point. It is in this way that the Borromean knot represents the intersection of at least three rings, which illustrate the convergence towards the point *a*. The three rings are rings of meaning, says Lacan, but—more precisely—they are the meanings of the real, of the imaginary, and of the symbolic, knotted together by the presence of the object *a*. This point is called a 'pinning point', if you regard it as a knot; it's a point of convergence, if you regard it as a topology of signifiers. I'd like to emphasise that, before knots, Lacan had already introduced the notion of convergence, which has the advantage of being situated in the field of the topology of signifiers, and is therefore more accessible with respect to problems of clinical practice.



We can return to the development of this session in terms of such a schema. The three 'rings of meaning', the three topological neighbourhoods which are in play at the start of the session, are:

1. To go, to leave, etc. (*partir, quitter...*)
2. To vomit, disgust, etc. (*vomir, dégoût...*)
3. Prefecture, papers, passport, etc. (*préfecture, papiers, passeport*)

My intervention produced a drawing tighter of this convergence, by indicating its limit signifier: 'rejection'. This piece of information could have produced no effect, but the patient integrates it into a fourth ring, that of:

4. Paternal rejection (*rejet paternel*).

The effect which we have located is the suspension of meaning, and the catching hold again of the signifying chain by means of the print.

After that, a new chain unwinds, again determined through three neighbourhoods:

1. To go, to leave my consulting room (*partir, sortir de mon bureau*);
2. To be stifled (*elle étouffe*);
3. How she chose her profession (*comment elle a choisi sa profession*).

What is interesting is the difference between the initial situation and that at the end. The initial structure displays a convergence towards one signifier, that is, a signifying stasis—or, again, a symptom, in the sense of a condensation—where the signifier 'rejection' finds itself stuck to the object. It seems that the effect of the interpretation would have been, on one hand, the unsticking of the signifier in relation to the object—which can be seen in the fact that her problems with her papers will sort themselves out, and that she will not obey her compulsions to leave. On the other hand, there's an effect of subjectivity in so far as she remembers something primordial in her existence—the choice of her profession: primordial in the sense that she had left everything behind, and crossed the ocean in order to bring it into being. A short time after this session, she found herself in the position of being able to pay for her sessions herself.

Notes

¹ This article was first published as Charraud 1987, in the special issue of *Ornicar?* devoted to interpretation. It, and some two dozen other articles, appeared together under the general title: *A Calculus of Interpretation*. The present text is a translation by Bernard Burgoyne. All footnotes to this text are those of the translator.

² In the original: 'il y a du rejet'.

³ The term *rejeter*, in French, has an extensive field of associations. It means to throw up, to spew out, to cast out, to expel, to discharge, to push back, to repel, to reject, to turn down, to dismiss. It can also have a somewhat different meaning—to sprout new shoots, put out new growth. *Rejet* can, therefore, signify 'rejection', or 'a reject', as well as acting as a vehicle for the other threads of association listed above.

⁴ One of the functions of the dream is that of 'interpreting' the dream-thoughts, thereby directing them *away* from the dream wish, whereas the analyst's interpretation attempts to open up a path *towards* the dream wish.

⁵ Lacan's formalisation of the object which operates as the cause of desire is this little algebraic letter *a*. It is located on the edges, at the boundary of the networks woven by the signifying chain.

⁶ The *mathème* is the field of the mathematical relations that exist between formalisations of aspects of human activity and passion. *Mathèmes* allow the analyst a mode of intervention

and interpretation, which is supplementary to the classical Freudian mode of interpretation within the context of a family romance. Differing styles of clinical practice exist within the field of psychoanalysis. In particular, some Lacanian psychoanalysts make extensive use of the structure of mathemes, some less so. Some focus more upon algebraic forms of matheme, some more upon topological forms. The Lacan Seminar to which Nathalie Charraud refers in the text is his Seminar XXI—in particular, the session of 15th January, 1974.

⁷ Topology is the modern theory of space, of the most general spaces that are conceivable. So spatial relations between excitations, or between phrases, or between moments in the experience of a human soul, are all conceivable in this mathematical field, and therefore in the topological constructions of mathemes. In this field, frontiers or edges can be used to determine all the topological properties that are in play. Alternatively, there are many other notions that can be used to generate the structure of the space: Nathalie Charraud chooses here the notion of a filter, a notion that Lacan has analogised to that of a love philtre. For a development of a topology utilising another notion—that of 'neighbourhood'—see Charraud 1997, originally published as Charraud 1986.

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1

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ELEANORE ARMSTRONG PERLMAN is a psychoanalyst in private practice. She is a member of The Guild of Psychotherapists and the Site for Contemporary Psychoanalysis. She has contributed many papers on Fairbairn in both books and journals.

BERNARD BURGOYNE is a psychoanalyst, a founder member of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research, and a member of the Ecole Européenne de Psychanalyse, and of the Association Mondiale de Psychanalyse. He was educated at the University of Cambridge, the London School of Economics and the University of Paris. He is Professor of Psychoanalysis, and Head of the Centre for Psychoanalysis in the Institute for Social Science Research at Middlesex University. His current and pending publications include 'Interpretation' in *The Klein-Lacan Dialogues*, (1997) eds. Burgoyne and Sullivan, London: Rebus, and 'From the Letter to the Matheme' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jacques Lacan*, (2001) ed. Rabaté, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

NATALIE CHARRAUD is a psychoanalyst and a member of the Ecole de la Cause Freudienne and of the Association Mondiale de Psychanalyse. She is currently a lecturer in psychopathology at the University of Rennes II, having previously taught mathematics for many years at the University of Paris XIII. She has published widely on the relations between mathematics and psychoanalysis: amongst her publications are *Infini et Inconscient: Essai sur Georg Cantor* (1994), Paris: Anthropos and *Lacan et les Mathématiques*, (1997), Paris: Anthropos.

JAMES S. GROSTSTEIN MD is a professor of psychiatry at UCLA School of Medicine and a training and supervising analyst at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute and the Psychoanalytic Centre of California.

DARIAN LEADER is a psychoanalyst and founder member of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research in London. He was formerly Senior Lecturer in Psychoanalytic Studies at Leeds Metropolitan University, and is currently Honorary Visiting Academic at the Centre for Psychoanalysis, Middlesex University. He is the author of *Lacan for Beginners*, *Why do Women write more letters than they post* and *Promises lovers make when it gets late*. His most recent book is *Freud's Footnotes* (Faber, 2000).

PHIL MOLLON is a psychoanalyst of the British Psycho-Analytical Society and a psychotherapist who trained at the Tavistock Clinic. He has been interested in the work of Heinz Kohut for many years and has written two books on this topic: *The Fragile Self: The Structure of Narcissistic Disturbance* (Whurr