

ALIENATION AND SEPARATION (I)



Éric Laurent

I have chosen to speak on the concepts of alienation and separation in Seminar XI. The subtitle of chapter 16 is "Alienation," but none of the other chapters is entitled or even subtitled "Separation." I adopted this title because one of the cuts or breaks this seminar produced when it was delivered in 1964 was the introduction of alienation and separation as two operations constituting the subject. That represented a break, though it was probably not deciphered as such in those years, and a new alliance as well.

It represented a break because, at that time, what was well known to Lacan's audience was that he was applying categories derived from structuralist linguistics to psychoanalysis. Prevalent in those years was Lacan's stress on metaphor and metonymy as two operations constituting the unconscious or the work of the unconscious. We have a sign of that, for instance, in a text by François Lyotard which criticizes Lacan, by emphasizing that the unconscious, as elaborated by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, cannot be reduced to metaphor and metonymy. (Lacan replied to this criticism in *Radiophonie*, an interview aired by the Belgian Broadcasting System.) What Lacan was being criticized for was his use of these categories, derived in part from Jakobson's work. It was not fully understood in 1964 that Lacan's introduction of the concepts of alienation and separation indicated a break with those of metaphor and metonymy and his previous mapping of the unconscious.

Alienation and separation, introduced here as operators derived from formal logic, mark a further step away from Lacan's former emphasis on "full speech," with its connection to phenomenology and existentialism, the

dominant philosophies of that era. With the linguistic operations of metaphor and metonymy, he had taken one step, and with the formal sciences and categories derived from a linguistic approach involving formal languages, not natural ones, he took a further step. Alienation and separation are directly related to the two basic operations of first order logic.

In the first line of chapter 16, Lacan indicates the epistemological horizon of his work—that of constituting psychoanalysis as a science. This project goes as far as trying to define the exact nature of a science that could include psychoanalysis. Lacan is speaking from an epistemological point of view (to paraphrase one of Quine's titles) when he stresses that, if psychoanalysis is to be constituted as the science of the unconscious, one must begin with the notion that "the unconscious is structured like a language." That is what Jacques-Alain Miller has called Lacan's main thesis.

But, the second paragraph introduces a curious deduction therefrom: "From this I have deduced a topology." (203) How does one deduce a topology from the axiom that the unconscious is structured like a language? This was always quite difficult to understand for Lacan's audience. It does not seem natural. Linguists have proposed virtually no topologies that accommodate the axiom of a system structured like a language.

Still more mysterious is how a topology can account for the constitution of a subject. The subject is a concept which seems to escape any topological or logical definition. Furthermore, Lacan adds that his topology responds to criticisms that he was neglecting the dynamic point of view in psychoanalysis. He says:

At a time that I hope we have now put behind us, it was objected that in giving precedence to structure I was neglecting the dynamics so evident in our experience. It was even said that I went so far as to ignore the principle affirmed in Freudian doctrine that this dynamics is, in its essence, through and through, sexual. (203)

We have here three steps: first, the unconscious is structured like a language; second, a topology can be derived therefrom that accounts for the constitution of the subject; and third, the subject in turn accounts for what is known in psychoanalysis, though not in Lacan's teaching, as the dynamic point of view. This subject is linked with the drives or instincts and cannot be separated therefrom. One of the objectives of chapter 16 and the two that follow is to substitute a topological viewpoint for the so-called dynamic viewpoint. Lacan tries to show that these two points of view are identical, and that what Freud presents, using energy metaphors derived from nineteenth century mechanics, has to be revised from a formal twentieth century standpoint. That standpoint, far from instituting a logic that excludes

time, includes a temporal function. Yet there is always a problem introducing time into a formal logical system.

Hegel tried to establish a logic that could include time, but his views were widely repudiated by formal logic. What Lacan tries to establish is precisely that, from his standpoint, distinct from Hegel's, a temporal function can be introduced within the "logification" of operations constituting the subject. And with that temporal function, the dynamics of transference can be thoroughly accounted for.

Jacques-Alain Miller was the first in the Lacanian community to draw out the consequences of the substitution of alienation and separation, as the new pair of opposites, for the old pair, metaphor and metonymy, especially in "The Other Lacan" (*D'un autre Lacan*), a lecture he gave in Caracas in 1980 (*Ornicar?* 28, 1984). Thanks to Miller's lecture, we can now note the importance of the mention of metonymy at the end of chapter 16:

In this interval intersecting the signifiers, which forms part of the very structure of the signifier, is the locus of what, in other registers of my exposition, I have called metonymy. (214)

This substitution also, as I said earlier, represents a new alliance. Before the consequences of this substitution were understood, there was, in Lacan's audience, a separation between the practicing analysts and the academics. The academics were delighted by the use of metaphor/metonymy, which they knew how to handle; they saw the importance of that use and were enthralled by a new approach that stressed a method well known in literary criticism, for instance. The practicing analysts were delighted to see that all the mechanisms pointed out in *The Interpretation of Dreams* could be spoken of in terms of metaphor/metonymy, but did not see very clearly how to do anything with that, apart from sticking with the mechanisms of dream interpretation. These two separate audiences were brought together by Lacan when he defined the process of analysis, analytic treatment, in terms of alienation and separation, and the final phase of analysis, the end of the experience, in terms of separation.

Lacan founded his own school, the *École freudienne de Paris*, in 1964 and Seminar XI is the first seminar he gave to his trainees. Three years later, he made a proposition to define in his school in some precise way the end or final phase of an analysis (*Scilicet* 1, 1968). In that 1967 proposition, he introduced a new category, the "pass"—alienation and separation—to define the category of being in analysis, the ontology psychoanalysis can provide through which human sexuality can be grasped. This ontology links the subject and his desire to a want-to-be, to a lack of being, and at the same time attributes substance only to jouissance, the only substance Lacan recognizes.

Trying to define alienation in chapter 16, Lacan points out that he needs the concepts of the subject and the Other, defining the Other as “the locus in which is situated the signifying chain that governs which aspect(s) of the subject may become present.” (203) This definition links the Other and the subject in a way that clearly constitutes an alienation: the subject as such can only be known in the place or locus of the Other. There is no way to define a subject as self-consciousness.

This is a point Lacan introduced long before his logical impulse. It started at the beginning of his teaching, when he opposed Sartre; Sartre was trying to establish a subject defined as an impasse in its self-consciousness.

In Sartre’s play, *No Exit*, three people are in a room. Each one has committed a crime, is a murderer in one way or another, and can see the hell, torment, or tormenting logic in which the other two are trapped, but cannot admit that he himself was at fault and is tormented by guilt without being able to determine whence that guilt came. He can only know in what sense he is guilty through the two others. At the end of the play (these are not the last words, which are “let’s go on,” but nearly the last) is the well known sentence, “Hell is other people.” In fact, we cannot know ourselves as subjects; there is no self-consciousness of ourselves—we are obliged to know ourselves via others.

Lacan replied in a very specific way to Sartre’s play in an article published in 1945 entitled “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty” (*Newsletter of the Freudian Field* 2, 1988). It is not a play; it is a logical construction, a logical game or puzzle, in which three people are in a room. It is a prison and they are condemned to death. In Sartre’s play they are dead and condemned. In Lacan’s presentation they are condemned to death, but there is a way out. The way out is explained by the prison warden. He tells them the following: each one of them has a disk on his back which may be either black or white. There are three white disks and two black disks in all, from which the warden has chosen three—one for each prisoner. They cannot see their own disk, but they can see the disk of the two other prisoners in the room with them. They must attempt to figure out the color of their disk without talking among themselves, and the first to walk out the door and logically explain his conclusion shall be set free.

It is exactly the same logic as in Sartre’s play. Lacan reduces the Sartrian metaphor of original sin to a disk that everyone is wearing, and reduces Sartre’s view that one can have no direct access to one’s own guilt, and that one is condemned to live with one’s bad faith, to the fact that one cannot see the color of the disk one is wearing.

Having received this information from the warden, the three prisoners are locked in a room. Since there are three white disks and only two black

ones, if a prisoner sees two black disks, he knows that he obviously has a white one. Thus each of the three prisoners first tries to see the other two prisoners’ disks and then watches their movements. If one of them moves towards the exit, the other two know he has seen two black disks and thus that their disks must be black. They too can move towards the door and declare their disks blacks, and thus, within that structure with the three prisoners, revealing movements are produced.

Lacan stresses that truth, in this experiment, while attained independently by each individual, has the structure of a collective calculus: it can only be attained through the others. When he says that truth can only be attained “*par les autres*” (through the others), this is a direct response to Sartre’s “hell is other people.” The structure of the three condemned people and one lacking disk is exactly the Oedipal structure of the father, mother, and child trapped in their private hell. They can only calculate because one element is missing: the phallus. No one has it, but the three of them have to take that symbol into account to define their positions as father, mother, and child. If any one of them makes an error, thinking that he or she is the one that is missing—if the father thinks he is *the* father, if the mother thinks she is *Woman*, if the child thinks it is the phallus for its mother—then they all get stuck in their calculation. No one will find a way out. They will be stuck in eternal repetition.

But if they admit that that element is fundamentally missing—that everyone has to define his or her position with respect to that symbol—then they have a chance to attain what are known as truth values in analysis, that is, desire values. The solution to the impasse of sexual definition is the fact that there is no inscription of man and woman in the unconscious. There are only inventions that try to make up for that fundamental failure or lack in the unconscious.

This is probably the reason why Lacan, in “Science and Truth” (*Newsletter of the Freudian Field* 3, 1989), speaks of the phallus as a *gnomon*—a Greek term referring directly to Greek mathematics and the calculation of harmonic series—i.e., as a link between subject and other. That link in a chain, that is both a chain of signifiers and a chain of calculations, was introduced by Lacan at the beginning of his teaching to illustrate the dynamics of analytic treatment. It is true that the recognition of how one is defined as a subject—through the recognition and calculation of one’s identifications—can alleviate the sense of guilt one brings to analysis. The fact that one cannot find one’s way out of the private hell in which one is trapped has to do with the fact that it was there from the very beginning.

What Lacan adds in chapter 16 is the fact that drives arise in the subject. He says, “it is in this living being, called to subjectivity, that the drive is essentially manifested.” (203) Thus subject and drive are situated in

the same place, which seems in a sense paradoxical. But Lacan had previously made a play on words, using the letter "S" to designate the subject, which is pronounced the same way as Freud's *Es*, the id, which is the locus of the drives.

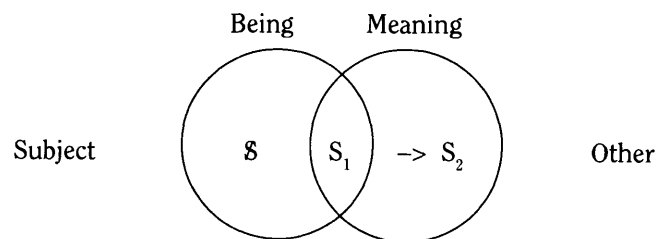
Drives cannot be represented as the Other *qua* whole. Drives are only partial, as Freud says, and Lacan reinterprets that by saying that the logic of the whole cannot appear in the Other ($\bar{\forall}$). There is no way to inscribe the quantifier "for all" or "the whole of" in the Other. No such quantifier can function in that place. $\bar{\forall}$ equals not all. Not all of the subject can be present in the Other. There is always a remainder. Lacan develops this in a way that alludes to the further development he provides in the seminar on feminine sexuality entitled *Encore*.

In Seminar XI, Lacan says:

Aristophanes' myth illustrates man's pursuit of his complement in a moving, yet misleading, way, by suggesting that it is the other, one's sexual other half, that the living being seeks in love. For this mythical representation of the mystery of love, analytic experience substitutes the search by the subject, not for his sexual complement, but for that part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is only a sexed living being, and that he is no longer immortal. (205)

Lacan reminds us that Aristophanes' myth of the original splitting of human beings explains love's longing to find its other half. This myth obscures the true meaning of longing: there is always a remainder in the subject's sexual representation in the Other. The two lacks that Lacan locates at the beginning of his lecture, and develops all the way through it, overlap. I will first present the two lacks and then explain them before we return to the text.

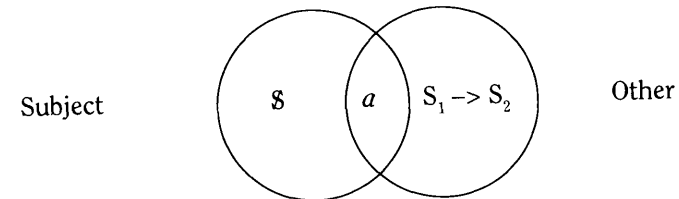
To present them I will use the formulations Jacques-Alain Miller has provided in his own commentary, because they are the simplest and most accurate in bringing out Lacan's essential point. To articulate the subject and the Other, a figure is supplied in Lacan's text. (211) Lacan links the subject and the Other, and situates being on one side and meaning on the other.



The first lack is related to the fact that the subject cannot be wholly represented in the Other: there is always a remainder, a remainder which defines the subject's sexually defined being. Not all of the subject can be presented here. The fundamentally partial character of the drives introduces a lack, which Lacan designates by drawing a bar through the subject (\bar{S}).

But then we have, more profoundly, a second lack. Unfortunately, in this seminar there is no graph or formalization of separation. Jacques-Alain Miller has, however, provided such a formalization in his lectures. To understand the second lack, the Other can be abbreviated as follows: $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$. This indicates that you need at least two signifiers to define the structure of the Other.

Once the subject is constituted, however, what has to be taken into account is the fact that there is a remainder—a remainder which is both within the subject as sexually defined and within the Other. To illustrate this, we can place the two signifiers in one part of the circle, object *a* where the unary signifier (S_1) was in my last figure, and the subject (\bar{S}) in the other circle.



We have two ways of defining the subject's lack, one of which is due to the fact that in alienation, at the very moment at which the subject (\bar{S}) identifies with a signifier, he is represented by one signifier for another ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$). For instance, a "bad boy" is represented as a "bad boy" in relation to his mother's ideal. Thus "bad boy" (or any other identification that served at one time as a master signifier) serves the subject as a guideline his whole life long. He is defined as such and behaves as such. At the very moment at which the subject identifies with such a signifier, he is petrified. He is defined as if he were dead, or as if he were lacking the living part of his being that contains his *jouissance*.

Whenever you isolate one of the subject's identifications, what you then need to do is find the fantasy ($\bar{S} \diamond a$) that goes with it, the fantasy that brings him some *jouissance*. How can he obtain some *jouissance*, some sexual being, when he is defined as a "bad boy" in relation to the woman he loves? What is the object—oral, anal, scopic, or invocatory—at stake in fantasy that brings him *jouissance*? Object *a* is the other part of the subject (and that is the second way of defining the subject's lack).

Thus we have one lack (S_1 in the first figure) here and another lack there (a in the second figure). In the first lack, when the subject is defined by a master signifier, a part of the subject is left out of the total definition. Even if he is a “bad boy,” he is other things as well. Then we have a second lack, in which the subject tries to inscribe a representation of jouissance within the Other in the text of his fantasy, and tries to define himself through that fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$). When he tries to define himself in that way, he creates another lack: the fact that his jouissance is only partial.

Lacan, then, as I said, tries with these categories, which seem so abstract, to provide a mapping of the course of analytic treatment. Implications can be derived from these categories—implications for the handling of interpretation in analytic treatment. He says:

One of the consequences of alienation is that interpretation is not limited to providing us with significations of the paths followed by the psyche that we have before us. This range is no more than a prelude. Interpretation is directed not so much at meaning as at reducing signifiers to their non-meaning so as to find the determinants of the whole of the subject's behavior. (212)

The distinction Lacan tries to make here is of the utmost importance. Interpretation is conceived of as the enumeration of all of a signifier's sexual significations. Let's take the case of a patient who's obsessed by the number three. He has a number fixation. That creates problems for him, especially if he is an accountant. Every time he goes through columns of numbers he misses the threes. Then he has to check how many threes he has missed, and this can take up a great deal of his time. You could start by exploring or mapping all the sexual significations of the number three. What happened when he was three years old? What happened in his Oedipal triangle? Was he attracted, for instance, to a *ménage à trois*? There may be a whole set of significations.

That is only the first step, but it is a necessary first step—you have to map all the significations, and explore in precise detail all the circumstances in the patient's life where three functioned as a master signifier and draw out their significations. But once that mapping is done, you have to lead the subject somewhere else—to a place where every signifier has this function ($\$ \rightarrow a$) for him. After all, $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ leaves him without a true sexual referent that could give him his place.

Once you've gone through all the symptoms defined by that obsession with numbers, then you have to explore another dimension of the subject. Apart from the symptoms, he must define himself with respect to a precise fantasy. It is through a nonsensical chain of master signifiers, linked to-

gether in a certain way, that the fantasy is defined which determines his sexual behavior or his self-identity.

In the course of this discussion, Lacan refers to a colloquium held in the town of Bonneval in 1960,¹ where a confrontation took place between Lacan's students and psychiatrists and psychoanalysts of other persuasions. The meeting was organized by Henry Ey, one of the great figures in French psychiatry, and Lacan gave a lecture entitled “Position of the Unconscious,” which was published in the French edition of the *Écrits*. At that colloquium, Laplanche and Leclaire made presentations, and Leclaire gave a well-known paper in which he showed how a Lacanian analysis could be worked through.

Leclaire discussed a patient named Philippe who had a series of obsessive symptoms. The patient was especially obsessed with unicorns (*licorne* in French). The question is how come we aren't all obsessed with unicorns, for we have lots of reasons to be obsessed with unicorns. Philippe had obsessions that could be traced to the fact that he was defined, not as a bad boy, but rather as “poor Philippe” (*pauvre Philippe*). His mother always referred to him as “poor Philippe” and the connection of the sound of “au” in “*pauvre*” and “o” in “*licorne*” was stressed by Leclaire, who showed that “*pauvre Philippe*” was the sound that put Philippe to bed. It was connected with the dream he had of a unicorn with the voice of his mother putting him to sleep, saying “*pauvre Philippe*.” Leclaire noted that the unicorn represented the mother's phallus and Philippe's refusal to accept his mother's castration. In his dream he ensured that his mother was not poor from the phallic point of view.

From the standpoint of meaning, the link between the obsession and the dream (the central dream in Philippe's life), Leclaire pointed out that Philippe could be defined in terms of a chain that could be written as follows: Poôr (*d*) *J'e* - Li (Poordjeli) including “poor Philippe,” the “je” (I) of the subject, and “li” from Philippe, *licorne*, and *lit* (bed). All that could be included in a sort of chain, absurd in this juxtaposition, but it was the chain of the master signifiers in Philippe's life.

Lacan says:

I ask you to refer to what my student Leclaire contributed, at the Bonneval Colloquium, in application of my theses. You will see in his contribution that he isolated the unicorn sequence, not, as was suggested in the discussion [following his talk], in its dependence on meaning, but precisely in its irreducible and insane character as a chain of signifiers. (212)

What Lacan does not say is that, to Leclaire's way of thinking, that marked the end of the interpretive process. Leclaire presented it as the end of the analysis, while Lacan stresses the fact that it is only a prelude. Once you

have isolated a certain number of master signifiers in a patient's life, there is *another* problem. How can "poor Philippe" define himself, not by the phallus but rather by the remainder of the phallic operation, i.e. by his partial objects or rather object *a* (Lacan introduces object *a* as a logification of the partial object)?

The subject has to be driven through yet another labyrinth, not that of his identifications, but that of the ways he obtains jouissance—the ways he transforms the other he loves into an object. If we only isolate one chain ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$), we neglect the fact that poor Philippe loves women in a certain way. How? Does he treat a woman like a breast, setting the tone for his love affairs: clinging, demanding, being rejected, and always coming back? That would be an oral-style love affair, the woman's love being transformed into a breast one clings to. Or does he adopt an anal approach to women, falling in love, and then fleeing like a madman once the object he loves is reduced to an anal object that smells? Or a scopic approach, never seeing, in the object he loves, how that object deceives him blatantly, openly; not seeing the impasse into which he always falls; always falling in love instantly; placing great importance on the moment of being love-struck? Or does he reduce his loved one to a voice, a voice that gives him orders or leaves him with a compulsion to hear from her once more?

All of these approaches to love can be derived from the same chain of master signifiers, and one has to learn in one's analysis not only how one's identification is lacking and that the chain of master signifiers is not a new name for the subject (even in Philippe's case), as the subject's proper name is always lacking; one also has to see that one is not represented by one's love—one does not completely inscribe one's love in the locus of the Other. One must always find that other lack—the fact that as authentic as one's love is, one is always confronted with that same remainder—a remainder in the true sense of the term: one that reminds him of the fact that he is not represented, that there is a limit, that there is only partial representation. It reminds him of the jouissance he experienced through his oral demands and anal demands, and what he tried to obtain from his mother—her gaze or voice—which is not directly linked with need. You need to eat, you need to shit. You don't apparently need the Other's gaze or voice, but you nevertheless desire it more than you know.

Note

1. See *L'inconscient*, VIe Colloque de Bonneval, ed. Henri Ey, Desclée de Brouwer, 1966.

ALIENATION AND SEPARATION (II)



Éric Laurent

Today I will pursue the theme of alienation and separation I began with last week, stressing some of the clinical consequences thereof. I will start with pages 249 and 250 in chapter 19, "From Interpretation to Transference," because these pages contain an explicit statement by Lacan about an error that Jean Laplanche, one of his students at that time, made concerning Lacan's theory of interpretation. The error made by Laplanche (who was not an imbecile) arose because something in Lacan's work seemed to authorize Laplanche's position. Here is Lacan's statement:

Consequently, it is false to say, as has been said [by Laplanche], that interpretation is open to any and all meanings under the pretext that it is but a question of the connection of one signifier to another. (249–50)

In the heyday of metaphor and metonymy, Laplanche stressed the fact that, while metaphor is an effect of the signification produced by the substitution of one signifier for another, and metonymy is the fact that these signifiers are linked on the same level with an effect of signification, any effect produced is admitted into the formula. You have no constraint on the metaphoric or metonymic aspects of interpretation and, as in jazz age epistemology, "anything goes."¹

It seemed like anything that produced an effect was acceptable, and at that time some of Lacan's followers thought that Lacan's "expressionist" character and Baroque ways were based on the notion that the most important thing was to produce an effect of any kind. Many people tried to imitate