

LACAN'S SUMMARY OF SEMINAR XI*

Cormac Gallagher

Background

At a press conference during the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris* Congress in Rome in 1974, Jacques Lacan got involved in a question-and-answer session of a type guaranteed to set on edge the teeth of those not uncritically devoted to his cause.

Miss X: - Could you specify for us what distinguishes the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris* from other schools?

J. Lacan: - We are serious. That's the decisive distinction.

Miss X: - The other schools are not serious?

J. Lacan: - Absolutely not!

This claim to a monopoly on seriousness with regard to psychoanalysis derives very much from the events which ten years earlier had formed the background to Seminar XI on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* which we are considering today. These events are probably too well-known to most of you to require more than the briefest summary.

* This article is the text of a lecture presented on June 10th 1995 to an audience comprising the members of APPI, the students and graduates of the School of Psychotherapy, St. Vincent's Hospital, and staff and students of the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, LSB College. In reproducing that presentation here we have opted to preserve the features specific to a spoken text. (*Ed.*).

Since their inadvertent resignation from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1953, Lacan and his colleagues in the French Psychoanalytic Society had made strenuous efforts to rejoin that organisation. The main stumbling block to re-admission was the body of theory that Lacan was creating on the basis of his return to Freud and the style of analytic practice that he felt derived from that theory - especially as regards the formation of analysts. That style did not conform to the norms of classical psychoanalysis, especially in the use it made of variable sessions. Furthermore Lacan offended the received wisdom that students should not attend lectures until a certain stage of their training analysis. These norms and practices Lacan described as obsessional ceremonials relating more to religion than to science. For him the insistence of the IPA on treating them as absolute conditions for readmission to the fold was evidence of an essential lack of seriousness about the real issues facing analysis in the contemporary world.

Lacan's group was eventually confronted with a serious choice: either dismiss Lacan permanently from his teaching and training functions or remain forever cut off from the International Association founded by Freud for the protection and promotion of his discovery. But despite the gravity of the situation - he wrote that such dismissal might lead to his social and moral ruin - Lacan repeatedly comes back to the comic dimension of the situation his colleagues had put themselves in by their eventual decision to exclude him.

Here was a group of his closest followers - a *brochette*, as he calls them - who for years had occupied the front row of his seminar, now deciding that the man who had analysed, supervised and taught them should be disbarred from precisely those functions with regard to the next generation of trainee analysts!

Lacan was devastated by the decision which was finally taken on November 19, 1963 and on the following day, in what was to have been the beginning of his 1963-64 Seminar on the *Names of the Father*, he appeared to have concluded that his teaching role was at an end. But encouraged by

some powerful friends - notably Louis Althusser and Claude Levi-Strauss - who assured him that he was not alone and that his ideas were very much appreciated outside the analytic community, if not within it, he rallied and by January 15, 1964 he had been given a teaching position in the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* and a lecture theatre in the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* and was beginning a new phase in his teaching.

In its English translation *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* runs to almost 300 pages of often impenetrable prose. In the reading group a number of us have been participating in during the past academic year we have discovered that each of its chapters requires hours of work if it is to yield even a minimum of its meaning. This is particularly so since every page, every line of the translation swarms with errors and it is necessary to have recourse not simply to the published French version but to the original manuscript if the full richness of Lacan's ideas is to be grasped. A new critical edition of this seminar and a serious translation based on it are urgently required. Until they appear most English-speaking students of Lacan will regrettably find themselves turning to the recently published *Reading Seminar XI* with its rather scholastic interpretation of the theses contained in it.

It is curious that the editors of this book do not seem to have adverted to the succinct and quite readable summary of the Seminar written by Lacan himself. This was published in the year-book of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* in 1965 and was printed on the back cover of the original French edition. In it Lacan extracts what he considers to be the essentials of the Seminar and given the severe limitations on our time I do not think we could find a better introduction to the main points of what he had to say in the course of that year.

Commentary on the Summary

The hospitality extended by the Ecole Normale Supérieure and a greatly increased audience indicates a change of front in my discourse.

The change of front is not limited to the change in Lacan's personal circumstances. It also marks a historically decisive change in the sort of people who now had direct access to the teaching of psychoanalysis. This new audience was not only greatly increased but also much younger, more philosophically oriented and less clinically experienced than the one Lacan had been addressing for the previous ten years as part of the training programme of the French Psychoanalytic Society. Something I had overlooked until recently is that Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan's son-in-law and the editor of the Seminars, was only twenty years old when he attended this Seminar and had no direct experience of psychoanalysis. This may also give a certain historical context to the BA in Psychoanalytic Studies at LSB College that many of you are involved in as teachers or students. The Seminar of 1964 is the first addressed by Lacan to young people whom he frequently said were more open to his message than those who were older and more experienced.

For ten years my discourse had been calibrated to the needs of specialists, the only people, no doubt, able to witness in a proper way the action par excellence psychoanalysis proposes to them. But it is a matter of fact that the conditions of their recruitment leaves them very closed to the dialectical order that governs this action.

Here Lacan returns to Freud's constant theme that only those who had a personal experience of psychoanalysis had a right to meddle in it but he confronts this with the fact, also remarked on by Freud, that those who are in

the best position to see the way that psychoanalysis can produce its effects are closed, 'very closed', by their medical training to the sort of argumentation that grounds analysis. One of the practical consequences of this is an unwillingness to rely on a talking cure in the case of serious illness and especially in life-or-death situations. It used to be a standing joke in St Vincent's that when the going really got rough the psychoanalyst would invariably have to appeal to a real doctor who could bring into play the whole array of treatment procedures from psychopharmacology to temporary certification.

Here in this Seminar we have the first indications that despite the fact that Lacan himself and a majority of his School had a psychiatric formation, he, like Freud in the *The Question of Lay Analysis*, was coming to the conclusion that psychoanalysis was not safe in the hands of doctors whose primary concerns were necessarily therapeutic. His own expulsion from the medically dominated IP A was evidence for him of a failure of commitment to analysis that extended from its clinical practice to its political organisation.

Now, in a move that continues to have the most profound implications for Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially in the English-speaking world, he was turning more and more to followers formed in mathematics and logic. It was these, and not the clinicians, that he would come to see as best being able to continue his work after his death.

For their use I had put together an *organon* which I transmitted in accordance with a propaedeutic method which put forward no stage of it before they were able to appreciate the well-foundedness of the preceding one.

So that whole series of seminars from the one on *Technique* in 1953-4 to that on *Anxiety* in 1962-3 constituted an introduction to a method of approaching the psychoanalytic enterprise which he parallels to the classical constructions of Aristotle and Bacon. The ordering of a multiplicity of psychoanalytic notions in thinking tools such as the Graph and Optical Schema is the

clearest example of this sort of formalisation and grounding of Freudian thought necessary for the work of practitioners.

It was this presentation that it seemed to me I should radically alter, finding in the crisis less a reason for a synthesis than the duty of illuminating the abruptness of the real which I was re-establishing in the field Freud left in our care.

This summary was written while Lacan was giving Seminar XII on *Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis* and indeed his presentation there had radically altered in that it called for a much more active participation from his audience and an attempt to confront the clinicians with the fundamental questions of the logicians. The imaginary support provided by narrative clinical material is from now on much less in evidence as Lacan obliges his listeners to assume the 'duty' of illuminating the real - what I translate as the *o-object* - that is at the heart of the Freudian discovery. This real was also what Lacan had put at the centre of his Seminar on *Ethics* and it is indeed this ethical dimension, the decisions that have to be made in a 'crisis', that is the crucial one in taking psychoanalysis seriously. This is also how Lacan reads Freud's interpretation of the Irma dream: as a summons to whoever has ears to hear to take on the risks and rigours of the psychoanalytic path rather than falling back on the socially approved conventions of the medical, psychological or common-sense discourse. There is no need to stress how actual such a choice as this is for each one of us and how much more tempting it is, especially in serious cases, to have recourse to medication, behavioural treatment or social manipulation rather than to rely simply on the talking cure.

Far from being a Hegelian reduction of this real (except to reaffirm it as rational) my effort gave its status to the subversion produced in the subject of knowledge.

The goal of becoming rationally self-conscious, of developing a synthesis which will allow an understanding and a domination of the real is the traditional goal of a philosophy which reached its high point with Hegel. Medical and psychological science aim at acquiring an objective body of knowledge that the practitioner can apply to particular cases. This, in Lacan's view, is incompatible with psychoanalysis which lays the emphasis on the unconscious, thereby subverting the whole status of conscious knowledge.

My lectures this year choose the four concepts which play an originating function in this subversion: the unconscious, repetition, transference, the drive - in order to redefine each of them and to show that they are bound together by a topology which supports them in a common function.

It is not at all obvious why Lacan should have chosen these particular concepts as being *the* four that can be described as fundamental. If you take the Freudian orientation, for example, where is repression, where is resistance, where is sublimation, where is affect, where is anxiety, where is the ego, where is the id, where is the superego? Surely these are all fundamental concepts in psychoanalysis. And even in Lacan's own formalisations, notions like the Other, desire, the name of the father, the real, the imaginary, the symbolic might all appear to deserve to be called fundamental.

In addition there is the introduction of the notion that to situate these correctly we have to venture away from Lacan's traditional preoccupations with linguistics as a model for understanding the functioning of the human subject into an obscure branch of mathematics called topology. This is by no means Lacan's first reference to topology and the seminar on *Identification* in particular makes continual use of topological shapes such as the torus, the Moebius strip and the cross-cap.

Many people find Lacan's use of topology incomprehensible and unhelpful so it may be as well to point out that by invoking it he is extending and refining Freud's use of geometrical models to provide a picture of the mental apparatus. Geometry as the study of the properties of space had a clear relevance for Freud in that he saw the different agencies of this apparatus as being in a regular spatial relation to one another and the unconscious as being situated in a different location to that of conscious life.

Topology is a branch of geometry and so is concerned with spaces but specifically with the properties of spaces that are not disturbed by distortion or stretching. For example, a circle is no longer a circle if it loses its shape and is transformed into a square. But it remains the same topological figure as long as it remains a surface bounded by an edge.

Lacan uses different shapes to illustrate different theses and to involve his students in the sort of gymnastics necessary to visualise mental processes in a more accurate way. For example, the fact that the Moebius strip - a belt or ribbon whose ends are fastened together after the strip has been given a half-twist - does not define an inside and an outside in the way a circle does, is used to question the received psychoanalytic wisdom of distinguishing between the container and the contained. It is this sort of geometry rather than the traditional two-dimensional variety which, in Lacan's words, binds together and supports the subversive functioning of his four fundamental concepts.

The question that is my radical project thus abides: the one that goes from: *Is psychoanalysis a science?* to *What is a science that includes psychoanalysis?*

Lacan's concern about the scientific status of psychoanalysis had been given a new edge after his irrevocable exclusion from the International Psychoanalytic Association, a procedure that seemed only to be understandable in terms of excommunication from a religious sect. His banishment was not based on any scientific criteria but on his failure to

conform with what he had often described as the obsessional practices that had taken the place in psychoanalysis of scientific praxis. Science, not convention, is necessary to provide a basis for coherent action and psychoanalysts' rigid adherence to such formalities as the fifty-minute hour came from their uncertainties about the scientific foundations of their work.

The concern with the scientific nature of psychoanalysis had occupied many analysts since Freud and one of Lacan's principal interlocutors in this and other Seminars, Thomas Szasz, argued that it could only achieve this status by conforming to the objective norms of the physical sciences. In particular Szasz felt that the whole notion of the transference, which consisted for him in deliberately leading the analysand into error and then correcting him on the basis of the analyst's superior knowledge, had to be abandoned in favour of an honest reciprocity between the two people in the analytic situation.

Lacan's wager is that he can construct a science which does not abandon the fundamental tenets of analysis, for example, that it involves one person who is suffering coming to address himself to another subject who is presumed to know. To accept Szasz's proposition that psychoanalysis is a science only if it has objective realities against which there can be measured the correctness of the analyst's as opposed to the analysand's statements is to reduce psychoanalysis to some sort of cognitive-behavioural therapy and eliminate any reference to the four concepts that ground its theory and practice.

Let us now look at these four concepts in turn and see whether we cannot in fact get some indication of their theoretical import and also see whether they allow us to go beyond the usual pre-occupation with affect and counter-affect to a more articulated sense of what happens in analytic practice:

The unconscious maintained in accord with my inaugural resolution as an effect of the signifier and structured like a language was here taken up as a temporal pulsation.

So he continues to maintain, - and that is always his primary thesis - that the unconscious is an effect of language, in other words that the Freudian unconscious is not some primary natural given which we have always known to have existed. Implicit in Freud is the primacy of the symbolic order and it is only in the interaction between the living being, the inchoate subject, and that order that the unconscious is constituted. Much of the current Seminar is taken up with the role of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, the representative of a representation, in this constitution. But what Lacan chooses to emphasise in his summary is the notion of the unconscious as a temporal pulsation which appears to be more primary than its linguistic structuring.

Now, in practice, what does that mean? In practice that means that the unconscious opens and closes, there is a temporal pulsation and you can see this concretely anytime you listen to somebody speaking, especially in an analytic session. Somebody said to me no later than yesterday - he is complaining about the fact that he is being dominated by his female partner - that 'the terms of the relationship are always dictated to by Mary'. The intrusion of the little word 'to' is a manifestation of another discourse intervening here. For a moment something opens and then closes to produce a disturbance of the preconscious organisation that governs his speech and it is there that as an analyst you are called on to intervene by revealing to the subject in his own speech something about his position of which he knew nothing - his own dictatorial stance with regard to his female partners. The intervention has to be a punctual one. The unconscious, as Lacan says, is never going to be a tourist attraction because it is always just closing when you get there.

The second fundamental concept is repetition:

In repetition there was brought to light the function of *tuche* concealed behind the appearance of *automaton*: the missed encounter is isolated here as relation to the real.

Repetition has commonly been seen in analysis as analogous to the automatism of habit - a sort of conditioned reflex which means that you always choose weak men or strong women because you learned to relate in a particular way to your mother or father. In particular, repetition is supposed to govern transference reactions in the analytic situation and this was in fact the way repetition and transference were first introduced by Freud. One of the main tasks Lacan sets himself in this Seminar is to disentangle the two concepts and to redefine each of them in a way that does not make repetition dependent on transference.

The primary point to be established is that repetition - which is our weak translation for *Wiederholung*, dragging something up again, in Olga Cox's earthier version - is not determined by habit but by chance, luck, fortune. In other words what is repeated is not what is learned from experience and what you have more or less consciously mastered, but what has escaped you, what you have not grasped, the *tuche* of the missed encounter. It is a commonplace in analysis to say that traumatic experiences are repeated, but trauma is precisely defined as what could not be mastered or assimilated or understood. In other words it is around what has failed to achieve a representation, a *Vorstellung*, that your history revolves.

Again, you come across this concretely the whole time in the way people describe their reactions to the minor irritants of life but let me rather take a simple example from Freud's Irma dream to which we already referred. Freud is told by a colleague that he is not doing a good job with Irma and he has the sort of reaction of annoyance that any one of us might have but as he says 'my disagreeable impression was not clear to me'. Now that, I believe, is the missed encounter. It is what you cannot put your finger on in a particular situation that evokes one of the missed encounters that have structured your existence, a repetition that puts you in touch with the reality of that lack and gives rise to a desire that in Freud's case gave rise to the dream that inaugurated psychoanalysis.

Let us now turn the third fundamental concept.

The transference as a moment of closure linked to the deception of love, was integrated with this pulsation.

I presume he means the temporal pulsation described as a primary feature of the unconscious. It might perhaps be said that the unconscious opens with repetition and closes with transference. Transference, Lacan describes in this Seminar, as something that begins once there is a subject who is supposed to know. As such it is not limited to the analytic situation. If you think that your mother knows everything about your life then there is transference in this sense.

Analysis begins when the person enters into a transference with the analyst and if that does not occur, if the person does not assume, does not presume that you know then they do not come to talk to you and if they do come, they do not stay. But the crucial moment in the development of the transference is when the presumption of knowledge is transformed into a love, a deceptive love which results in the closure of the unconscious.

Lacan spent a dozen or more sessions in the Seminar on *Transference* talking about the way, for example, in which Socrates was first approached by his disciples as the one who knew and then became an object of their love. This transference love was seen by Freud from the beginning as the main agent of change in analysis. This love is deceptive because like all love it is essentially narcissistic. It is the assumption that what I am lacking you have and that you as my beloved can make up for what I am lacking. In persuading the other that he has what can complement us we assure ourselves of being able to continue to misunderstand what precisely we lack'.

In this Seminar Lacan modifies both the notion of repetition and the notion of transference and distinguishes them from one another. He would say that that notion of transference as simply repetition of a previous situation is a way for the analyst of disavowing his place in the transference and laying the whole responsibility for transference reactions on the shoulders of the analysand. On the contrary Lacan emphasises that the desire of the analyst is much more a factor in the way the transference develops than the predispositions that the patient brings to the analysis.

This places the accent on the synchronic rather than the diachronic while at the same time radically rejecting the contemporary British obsession with the analyst's counter-transference reactions.

We will move on to the Drive:

Of the drive I put forward a theory which, in mid-1965 when I am suddenly being pressed to produce this summary, has not yet been demarcated.

As reason for its constancy, the topology described as that of the edge which explains the privileged role of the orifices, the status of return action, the dissociation between aim and object appeared here for the first time.

This bag does not express the contours necessary to secure such a knot, nor what it circumscribes.

Perhaps the most useful thing that can be said about the drive is to refer you to Lacan's extensive commentary on *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, a text which is usually seen as making some rather straightforward and outdated remarks about the four interlocking components of the instinct - source, pressure, aim and object. Lacan treats it as one of Freud's most subtle accounts of the nature of human love and the way in which it is related to the partial instincts of sadism, voyeurism and narcissism.

The point he highlights here regarding the constancy of the drive comes straight from Freud and is what leads him to argue that only a topology can explain the paradox that human drives have no day and night, no summer or winter - that they do not abate when they are satisfied but instead exercise this *konstante Kraft*, the constant force which runs so counter to our usual conception of instinct. Topology, which emphasises the importance of the edge of a surface, is also invoked to explain why it is precisely the oral, anal, visual and auditory orifices that are privileged by

Freud as sources of the drive. The return action refers to the reversal of aim or object that Freud sees as one of the vicissitudes to which drives may be subjected - to look or be looked at, to hurt or to be hurt and so on.

The remarks about the drive continue:

I marked in it once again the preemption of the Cartesian subject in so far as it is distinguished from the subject of knowledge as subject of certainty - and how when it has been valorised by the unconscious, it passes to the rank of being a preliminary to psychoanalytic action.

Similarly, the scopic drive, which served me as a paradigm, was developed in a special way, demonstrating the antinomy in it between vision and the look with the aim of attaining the register of the lost object, so fundamental in Freud's thinking.

I formulated this object as the cause of this position of the subject which is subordinated to phantasy.

For Lacan, Descartes anticipated Freud in his search not for knowledge but for certainty. Descartes subverted all knowledge by his methodical doubt and was left with only the certainty of a subject of thinking from whom all other qualities had been stripped. Psychoanalysis gives this denuded subject at least the quality of being a desirer transforming the Cartesian *Cogito* into a Freudian *Desidero*. But Freud is a true successor to Descartes when he writes to the Hegelian Putnam: 'I have never been concerned with any comprehensive synthesis but with certainty alone' and Lacan states quite categorically that it is certainty rather than hypotheses that should guide the interventions of the psychoanalyst. The analyst is not the possessor of a general knowledge which is then applied to particular cases. The dictum of Picasso: 'I do not search, I find' is quoted approvingly by Lacan. The analyst is not to construct theories about the subject who is speaking to him, he is

there to hear and to reveal to that subject the incontrovertible signifiers which appear concretely in his spoken discourse.

The subject of the drive in this Seminar appears to be assimilated to the subject of certainty. And the drive that Lacan takes as a paradigm for the operation of all the others, the scopic drive, does indeed show that the apparently primordial *cogito*, I think, is itself based on a *video*, I see. The special way in which this was developed introduces the priority of an *I am seen* to this *I see*. The way in which we normally organise our visual world involves the masking of this dimension of being seen, the look - or gaze - which is thus promoted to the status of lost object, excluded from our world of representations but a key element in our unconscious phantasies. When this object does intrude into the world of representations it is perceived as uncanny and is Lacan's regular way of presenting the object of anxiety or the object cause of desire - one manifestation of what he describes as the *o-object*. This, and not the representations that it depicts, is also the object with which a painting captures us. Hence the extended treatment of the technique by which the artist accomplishes this miracle and a posthumous dialogue with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a close personal friend who had been preoccupied in a very special way with the phenomenology of the gaze.

But the simultaneous appearance, in a work of piety, of *The visible and the invisible*, in which there was interrupted at the very moment it was taking place, the obvious conversion of Merleau-Ponty's questioning, led me to mark the priority of structural features in any attempt to reach a position on being. I suspended my approach to it while at the same time announcing the subjective positions of being for the following year.

Merleau-Ponty's growing interest in psychoanalysis is indicated by his participation in the colloquium on the unconscious organised by Henri Ey at Bonneval in 1960. Lacan was the dominant presence at that meeting and although Merleau-Ponty died suddenly before he could submit his paper for

publication one remark attributed to him that 'The visible has a lining of invisibility' seems to echo Lacan's distinction between the world of representations and that of the real. The publication of *The Visible and the Invisible*, a collection of his later writings edited by one of his students, was announced by Lacan at his Seminar and served as a springboard for a dialogue with Merleau-Ponty and a renewal of interest in the ontological status of the subject of the unconscious.

You will be able to read, in time, the limits that, as implied in my statements I have set to the relaxation of my thematic suffered as a result of the wider diffusion I was surprised by at this juncture. This corrective concerns the fate of everything that today to an excessive degree rallies beneath the ensign of structuralism.

Once again, there is confirmed here in the progress of science, the ethical correlation to which psychoanalysis holds the key and whose fate is thus precarious.

Lacan is well aware of the sort of dilution his teaching might be subjected to in trying to bring it to this younger and wider audience and one that is not disciplined by the requirements of clinical effectiveness. He thus gives an assurance that very strict limits will be imposed to avoid the sort of popularisation and mass appeal that the structuralists were beginning to enjoy at that time. This determination to maintain a position that will enable psychoanalysis to develop as a science he sees as an ethical choice, one which is at work in all scientific progress but which remains obscure if one does not take into account the unconscious factors revealed by psychoanalysis.

That is why my final phase came back to the foundation of major logic, by putting in question on the basis of this locus of the Big Other, promoted by me as constitutive of the subject, the notion, debased by low-grade political criticism of alienation.

The discipline to which this new audience will above all be subjected is that of logic. Mathematics and logic will in fact come to counterbalance linguistics as the second major reference point for Lacan in his continuing attempts to give a scientific status to psychoanalysis and only those of the old guard who were willing to advance into this new territory continued to play an active role in his School. His analysis of alienation - and separation, which curiously is not mentioned here - goes well beyond the popular understanding which applied the concept to almost every social situation in which the individual could not do his or her own thing. For Lacan the living being is necessarily faced with an alienating choice once they begin to use language. Your money or your life, your alienation in language or your autistic isolation - to become a human being a price must always be paid. The only way in which we can conquer the little freedom that is open to us is by coming to the realisation that even in the discourse of the Big Other there are gaps which bear witness to a lack and to a desire.

Address for Correspondence:

*APPI
School of Psychotherapy
St Vincent's Hospital
Elm Park
Dublin 4
Ireland*