Introduction to Lacan

Five sessions, for analysts in training

Lionel Bailly

**1.The Ego and the subject**

Taking his lead from Freud’s use of the word ‘Ich’, Lacan used in in his texts ‘I’ in the place where, in keeping with the standard edition, other analysts would use ’ego’. His view of ‘ego’ is of an agency that while it forms the necessary mediating surface between the psyche and the external world, is also a largely fictional creation that must repress unwanted truths about itself. The fiction of the ego is created in a process exemplified by the Mirror stage during which the idea of whole self is precipitated by the baby’s encounter with its specular image. The Mirror stage later gave rise to an elaboration called the Optical Schema, in which he refined the process of constitution of the ego ideal.

Reading

Lacan J. (2006) The Mirror stage as formative of the I function as revealed in psychoanalytic experience, *in* Ecrits, translated by Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton, London, 75-81.

**2.The subject and the other**

The concept of ‘otherness’ is central to Lacan who posits the Subject as coming into being by means of its relationship with the other. This ‘otherness’ takes two forms: *le petit autre* (small other) and *le grand autre* (great Other). *Le petit autre* is not a real ‘other’ but the reflection and projection of the ego and *dependent upon image*. The Other indicates a radical otherness which is beyond the Imaginary and comes from language and the laws that govern reality - *le grand autre* belongs to the Symbolic order. At the very beginning of life, the baby is exposed to the Great Other in the psyche of its mother.

Reading:

Bailly L. (2009) The other, *in* Lacan A beginner’s guide, One world, Oxford.

**3. Lacan’s version of the Oedipus Complex**

Lacan’s thoughts about the Oedipus complex grew out of his preoccupation with the object. He followed the development of the infant’s relationships, from relating to an object through relating with another subject in relation to an object, and finally relating with a subject/object (mother) in relation to another subject/object (father) and an object (the phallus). In charting this course of development he sought to elucidate what each step required and brought in terms of psychic structure and functioning. In the end the phallus becomes the imaginary object of the mother’s desire, castration the symbolic loss of this imaginary object and the function of the father is to be a signifier substituted for the first signifier introduced into symbolization, the maternal signifier.

Reading:

Bailly L. (2018) Lacan’s version of the Oedipus Complex, *in* The Lacan Tradition, Lionel Bailly, David Lichtenstein and Sharmini Bailly Eds, Routledge, London, 97-110

**4. Representation and its format**

Lacan famously stated that the unconscious was structured like a language. He started his model with revisiting the interpretation of dreams, and he wrote that the dream “has the structure of a sentence… it has the structure of a form of writing…which…reproduces the simultaneously phonetic and symbolic use of signifying elements…” Mechanisms like condensation and displacement become metaphors and metonymies and all manifestations of the unconscious, such as bungled actions, slips of the tongue and symptoms are structured like a language. Beyond the impact of structural linguistic on psychoanalysis and the clinical use of concepts such as signifier and signified, Lacan’s take has much wider implications: the signifier is a symbolic element that is the building block of thinking and it is that symbolic piece of code that is repressed, displaced, projected, denied etc. As a consequence the child is not born with a dynamic unconscious but it is created by the repression of the first signifier when the thinking baby is faced with his/her first unbearable emotional dilemma.

Reading

Lacan J. (2006) The Instance of the letter in the unconscious, or the reason since Freud – part one, *in* Ecrits, translated by Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton, London, 412-424.

**5. Need, demand, desire and the object**

Demand is a formulation of the need and as such belongs to the symbolic realm. But demand transforms the need, making it more obscure. The ‘speaking being’ experiences the gap between what he/she needs and what he/she asks for. Desire results from that loss, the effect of the signifier on the need and lacan suggest that desire appears at the margin where demand is torn off the need. In his own words: “demand cancels the particularity of whatever is given by changing it into a proof of love” and love consists in “giving what one doesn’t have”.

Reading:

Vanier A. (2018) Object a, in The Lacan Tradition, Lionel Bailly, David Lichtenstein and Sharmini Bailly Eds, Routledge, London, 111-122.