

to neuro-biological or physical schemes and that in Lacan the model, the reference, has been mainly *linguistic* (or more recently *topological*) does not affect the radical particularity and separate existence of the fundamental psychoanalytical concepts which refer to a specific experience and are created in order to designate this experience. That this experience is articulated and articulable - that it is structured and can be expressed through language - 'in those figures which have a fixity of symptoms and can be resolved if correctly deciphered' as Lacan says, is at the heart of the Freudian inauguration of psychoanalysis as the 'talking cure'.

But at this point there is a complete misunderstanding in Bird's reading of Lacan [4]. So much so that the accusation of a 'linguistic reading of Freud' in Lacan's work (Bird, p.11) applies rather to the way Bird himself is understanding Lacan. Consider, for example, the symbolic as 'formed of the set of conventional symbols of social systems which is assimilated to a linguistic model, etc.' (Bird, p.10). This does not correspond to the psychoanalytical dimension of the symbolic which we find in Lacan's elaboration. The symbolic is no more nor less than *the order of the signifier(s)* - which is not just words or any words - and therefore it must not be confused either with the system of the language itself or merely with social symbols. Lacan says that the determination of the symbolic order over the imaginary exists in Freud and is recalled by him every time the mechanism of forgetting or in the structure of the fetishism is at issue (Lacan, *Ecrits*, p.464).

The idea of Lacan ignoring 'the natural and physical aspects of man - his drives and instincts' or reducing them to symbols which will never reach 'the real hard concrete aspects of life' (Bird, p.12) has nothing to do with the Lacanian conception of the symbolic which has enough materiality to mark real existence. As to the drives 'they have always been expressing their effects into language' (*Ecrits*, p.466).

Again, the distinction in Bird between *inner* (unconscious, drives) and *outer* (society, rules) world with the language as *intermediary* and the opposition between the individual needs and the social rules constitute a scheme very different from Lacan's categories of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. For Lacan, these three fundamental dimensions of the human experience can be tied in the way of a borromean knot [5].

The question of the 'metaphor of the Name of the Father', a *signifier* central for the understanding of the problem of psychosis in Lacan's theory, has also been investigated in this later period through the borromean knot.

A last misunderstanding in Bird's article concerns the training of the psychoanalyst in the Lacanian theoretical perspective. Personal analysis *is* the centre of this training. It should go as far as possible, ideally to the point where the individual signifiers are analysed and they resist any further signification; where the analysand can ideally say that he realises Freud's wish concerning the aim of psychoanalysis: 'Wo es war soll Ich werden', knowledge of the unconscious desire.

At the end of this analysis, or even before, in the course of the process, some of the analysands may experience the desire to continue the analytical experience from the point of view of the object they are leaving, i.e. the analyst. The possibility of giving an account of this moment has constituted the Lacanian proposition of 'la passe' which could provide new formulations of the question 'how one becomes an analyst'.

As to the 'absence' of analysis in training, here is a passage from what Lacan said in a conference 'On the experience of "la passe" and its transmission' (Lacan, 3 November 1973, *Ornicar*, No.12/13).

So here it is, what I obtain after having proposed this experience. I obtain something which is absolutely not of the order of the discourse of the magister. You ought to know how to notice the things I am not talking about - I have never talked about analytical training ['formation analytique'], I have talked about training of the unconscious ['formations de l'inconscient']. There is no analytical training. From the analysis an experience is drawn, which is quite wrongly qualified as didactic. Experience is not didactic. Why do you believe that I have tried to efface completely this term 'didactic' and talked of pure psychoanalysis?

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## Footnotes

- 1 Limited to the *Ecrits* (1966), and the only English-translated seminar (1964-65) on 'The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis', it ignores the rest, and especially the later work of Lacan where new elaborations appear. The *Ecrits* is a rather particular case by comparison with Lacan's other works, because it is his first and only book and constitutes a concise account of his ideas where the preoccupation with style is pre-eminent.
- 2 Lacan, being a psychoanalyst, developed his work as a series of questions emerging from his own experience, which he tried to answer through his reading of Freud, his own ideas and the critical reading of the work of other psychoanalysts.
- 3 S. Freud, Letter 52 to Fliess, dated 6 December 1896.
- 4 He is not the only one. There is always the danger in a work of isolating certain views and making them the key explanation of the whole. This is also the danger of a very limited reading. Lacan himself had another idea of his own progression: 'I began with the imaginary, I consequently chewed the story of the symbolic with this linguistic reference in which I did not find all that could help me and I reached my goal by extracting for you this famous real under the very form of the knot.' (Lacan, Seminar 14 January 1975, *RSI Ornicar* No.3).
- 5 The topological model of the borromean knot and the possibilities which it offers to the exploration of these three dimensions has become, after 1975, Lacan's main theoretical preoccupation. The elementary borromean knot is constituted by three rings of string which are tied in such a way that if you cut any one of them the remaining two are free (see diagram). The three rings correspond to the three dimensions, the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Lacan says that Freud had some idea of them but not the concept. With time and patience, he affirms, he extracted them from Freud's discourse (Lacan Seminar 14 January 1975, *RSI Ornicar*, No.3).

# NEWS

## Women's Studies at the Open University

In 1976, some members of the women's group on campus suggested that the Open University should put on a women's studies course for undergraduates. In February this year, the first students taking *The Changing Experience of Women* came to an introductory meeting. In between came two lengthy processes; first, persuading the university that this would be a coherent (that's to say, an academically respectable) subject to study, even though we acknowledged that women's studies courses got their political impetus from the women's movement. Secondly, trying to write the course so that, while we acknowledged that the course is an 'academic' one, it remains relevant to women's lives, experiences, and to the debates through which feminism has articulated political discontent about these, especially over the past decade.

Writing Open University courses for unknown generations of future students is always a peculiar business. There is always a separation - of distance, and of time - between course writers and students such that courses aren't put on in direct response to student demand, as may be possible in other educational situations. This separation, and the mainly individualised way that Open University students have to study, seemed particularly acute problems for a women's studies course. What would the students know or think about feminism? Nothing much could be assumed about this, since the course didn't arise out of direct student demand. Nor could we know even how many students would be women or men. Again, some of the students would want to take the course as a single commitment. But how many of these would there be, and how would they - possibly committed feminists already quite knowledgeable about the debates - get along with Open University undergraduates, some taking the course for a variety of other reasons?

The course which finally emerged begins with examinations of various characterizations of the biology and sexuality of women. We move on to look at presentations of women in literary and autobiographical writing by women in popular magazines. The course then considers women's and men's lives in relation to the family and in relation to work inside and outside the home both now and historically. We consider women's experience in relation to various aspects of the state and social services such as their tax and social security positions, education, health, and roles in the health service. The course ends with a consideration of violence against women.

Now that some students are enrolled on the course, answers to some of the questions have started to emerge, though it will be some time before we really know what the responses of students, the university, and the outside world in general to the course actually are. We do not know if or how the ideas in it will seem to link persuasively with changes students have experienced in their lives, or not; whether it will be seen as different from other Open University courses in this respect, or not. But in one or two ways, it is already obvious that the existence of this course does push against the constraints of the university system. For instance, some students have wanted to take the course as a (women's) group, and although this is to some extent possible in the Open University system, it does push against the individualised study that prevails. Secondly, because the course has a summer school, we have started arguing for a crèche or at least for arrangements for childcare at summer school to be taken seriously.

It remains to be seen what links will be made between studying women's position and changing it, whether in the university or in the rest of the world. But meanwhile, if you want to get a flavour of the course yourself, you can watch it on the television... Wednesdays at 5.10 pm, Saturdays at 9.45 am, once a month - see *Radio Times*.

Sonja Ruehl

## Australasian Committee on Women in Philosophy

In August 1981 the Australasian Association of Philosophy set up a Committee to report on the special problems concerning women in the philosophy profession in Australia and New Zealand, and to formulate policy proposals. The Committee's report, issued in August 1982, deals with: the poor representation of women in full-time and, especially, tenured posts; questions of the 'maleness' of academic philosophy - its effects on female students and on the employment prospects of female philosophers; the concentration of female philosophers in areas regarded as peripheral and expendable; sexism and sexual harassment in philosophy departments; responses to courses on feminism taught within Australian philosophy departments.

The Committee found that the representation of women in tenured positions - currently about 8% - had improved only marginally in the last decade, despite a marked increase in the number of suitably qualified female graduates in the same period. Although this situation is partly due to the contraction of universities in recent years, submissions to the Committee indicated that it is exacerbated by a number of factors which make the atmosphere of philosophy departments uncongenial to female presence, and also make women appear implausible candidates for what positions do become available. The report elaborates the ways in which these styles and stereotypes operating in academic philosophy reflect its domination by men, to the disadvantage of women.

The Committee's policy proposals were adopted at the annual general meeting of the AAP in August 1982. The proposals are intended to improve the 'visibility' of female candidates, and are designed to implement at departmental level an Affirmative Action Policy formulated by the Federation of Australian University Staff Associations. In accordance with the proposals, departments have been requested to actively seek applications from suitably qualified female candidates for vacant positions, to take up references and seek written work from all female applicants, and to make available, on request, to unsuccessful applicants the reasons for their lack of success. The policy is not intended as a 'preferential hiring' programme. Some of the issues at stake in the choice between 'affirmative action' and 'preferential hiring' are discussed in the report.

The AAP has established a further Committee to monitor the implementation of the affirmative action programme and to facilitate contact between female philosophers. A session for Women in Philosophy was held at the annual conference of the AAP in Melbourne in August 1982; a second session is planned for the next Conference in Adelaide in August 1983.

Copies of the report are available from Genevieve Lloyd, Philosophy Department, The Faculties, Australian National University, P O Box 4, Canberra, A.C.T. 2600, Australia.

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