

Lecture on Lacan's Seminar IX, *Identification*

Lessons Twenty-Four to Twenty-Six

Olga Cox Cameron¹

So as we reach the end of this seminar we need to check out where we have gotten to, and if it has been worth while. For me the o-object and the fundamental phantasy are Lacan's most important contributions to psychoanalytic theory and the stated intention repeated throughout *Identification* has been to answer the question; what is the o-object, to insist that all this topology is in the service of elucidating the fundamental phantasy. This is the basic fact to hold on to. What looks like — and *is* — head-wrecking abstraction is in fact a way of targeting the pith of our being. But does it succeed?

Historically the structure of what Freud called the psychical apparatus has been approached via many metaphorical pathways. Always and everywhere we have tried to body forth the structure and shape of how we think and how we feel. Music does it, painting does it, poetry does it. And even in an era that accords more prestige to scientific models, art retains its primacy in this respect. The question to be asked then is: how adequate, how effective is the topological model developed here?

And how possible is it for topology to work as a way of modeling the unconscious? As Antonia Soulez explains in a very interesting article on this topic, what prompts a thinker to construct a model is the difficulty of explaining phenomena. However, isomorphism — a one to one correspondence between the model and the original — is not always what is sought. For example 'in antiquity the celestial bodies were considered to be resistant to explanation because of their apparently irregular movements. So a system was constructed in which uniform circular movements would be substituted for those observable ones that resist understanding, in order to explain the latter by the former ...' (88). Obviously a clear gap exists here between the model and the original. And a model of course is not a metaphor.

For me even after all this topological demonstration its status in relation to the unconscious remains unsolved. And I was impressed to hear Dan the last day suggest that it is an open question.

What has been its impact on other thinkers? I was interested to hear Alain Badiou, who never attended the seminars, say that he was initially fascinated by what he called Lacan's 'very strange effort to link the question of the subject to investigations or models of a logics-mathematical kind'. This fascination is perhaps discernible in Badiou's focus on types of relation that are not reducible to so-called 'normal' thinking, what he calls a relation without relation. He even defines philosophy as exclusively interested in relations that are not relations suggesting that (9) 'the philosophers of my generation could not do without a real confrontation with Lacan' (45 128bz15). I find Badiou's manner of reading Lacan instructive in that he invokes narrative forms of incommensurability which for this reader at least are more graspable than intertwined tori. For example, in speaking of incommensurability, this relation without relation, he sidesteps endless turgid commentary with a very simple observation when he states; 'between the event of love (the turning upside down of existence) and the ordinary rules of life (the laws of the city, the laws of marriage) there is no common measure (11).

Coincidentally for us in the reading group, this last section of the seminar, Lessons Twenty-three to Twenty-six, opens with Lacan wondering if the status of metaphor is sufficient to describe the tori and their intersections as he has been drawing them. I quote; 'it is a question of knowing whether this

¹ This lecture was given at the final session of the Seminar on Lacan's *Identification* (IX), April 9, 2022, Dublin, Ireland.

metaphor goes beyond ... the pure plane of metaphor (292). Given that his answer will be yes, it is very interesting indeed to see the clustering of cautious terms like *analogy* and *symbol*, *depict* and *represent* here. The reader will note at least eight uses of these terms in the opening pages of Lesson Twenty-three as Lacan lines up all the facets of subjectivity which are illustrated by different manipulations of the torus. If you recall, in Lesson Fifteen when he had similarly listed the uses of the torus, there had been the same cluster of terms suggesting analogy or symbol, so for Lacan himself the status of the torus here is not clearcut.

So what does this torus manage to symbolise? Firstly the relationship of the subject to the Other — or at least a certain element of this relationship — a pictorial version of the repetition of demand via the winding thread around a spool with secondly — the central void explicitly symbolising the object of desire at this point. So already the ‘exemplary’ (292) value of the torus permits us a grasp of the circuit of demand, a symbolisation of both the o-object and desire itself. Simple enough, convincing enough. Thirdly the superimposition of two tori and the manipulations then described illustrates the manner in which the desire of the Other and the demand of the subject are in a relation of inversion. Hopefully Dan or Don will show more clearly than I can what Lacan calls here ‘the crossed equivalence of the demand of the subject to the desire of the Other, of the object of the subject to the demand of the Other’ (295). Fourthly and rather surprisingly this will ‘give a support’ to the function of the phantasy.

At this point Lacan manages a wonderful backhanded compliment to himself by praising two important recent publications by Heidegger and Levi Strauss respectively, noting what they have in common which is a search for something anterior to the classical subject-object opposition, but noting too that neither of them references what he Lacan is exploring which is the status of this object as object of desire (299) — something that has never been done before.

Although apologetic about tiring his audience, Lacan then embarks on a series of drawings that are meant to offer us a structuring support for the relation of the subject to the object of desire, in other words, the fundamental fantasy. One of the points graspable here is the distinction between shapes which are and shapes which are not specularisable. This in order to make the point that the o-object is not specularisable. Fine. A neat analogy. Weirdly though the point around which the various cuts are made turns out to be the phallus, and even more weirdly ‘it is in articulating the function of this point that we will be able to conceive the function of the phallus at the centre of the constitution of this o-object’ (307). If as it appeared in an earlier lesson this point is that around which every transformation occurs, we need to hear a lot more about it. As I have already said calling it the phallus is not enough. After many many pages of drawings he will say of this point that it is that which gives its accent and its dignity to the o-object (325) — a pretty huge statement, and something that as we will see further on, involves desiringness, a desirer, so from now on, to call this o-object object is clearly to fall short of what it actually is..

The question of representation looms large in the series of drawings that make up Twenty-three and Twenty-four.. If you remember in Desire where the o-object starts to be profiled for the first time., Lacan says of it; it is image and it is pathos. Now in Identification pages of drawings are produced to show the necessary existence of a hole- point which can *not* be represented anywhere but which must be recognised as essential. The drawings give Lacan trouble as he admits, but the point he wants to make on page 318 is that even though there is no way of representing it anywhere, it is necessary that the hole should remain ‘however small it may be’ for the surface to exist. Were it not there, nothing would be there, so Lacan can refer to it as *archen* — the origin point. Earlier and more than once Lacan had indicated that the specular and the o-object kind of rule each other out. When one appears, the other vanishes. ‘At this radical level which constitutes the subject in his dependence with respect to the object of desire, ... the specular function loses its hold as one might say’ (307). And Lesson Twenty-three ends with him making the same observation about this topological point. ‘For this point to

function as this point, it has this privilege of being precisely unsurmountable, you make vanish ... the whole structure of the surface' (311).

We are at the limits of representability here, at the edge of a vast central interlacing which escapes our thinking and which as Lacan puts it 'does not allow us in any way to give a satisfactory representation of' (303). Lacan's clunky description of what he is up to as a schematic schema of representation lets us see that it is not easy for him to body forth the fundamental fantasy in this manner.

But his insistence on what he is trying to achieve is noteworthy. Note the number of times he repeats that what is in question is a formalisation of the fundamental phantasy, that these shapes will allow us 'to articulate schematically the structure of desire'. Insistence however does not necessarily carry conviction., although topology may indeed illustrate certain facets of this structure. Is it possible to see a relation between a point in the cross-cap that 'manifestly carries with it the veritable structure of the whole apparatus' (320) and the o-object as he is trying to get us to locate it? Perhaps. Similarly the idea of an unfindable origin point, a punctiform hole, essential but unrepresentable and in a way enucleated, makes for an intriguing analogy — that which is not there but conditions all that *is* there. The fact that there is something in this process that is not visualise-able and that the manipulations seem to depend on an asymmetry and a distinction between what is and what is not specularise-able are in fairness, recommendations for the usefulness of topology here..

Having brought us this far Lacan appears to abandon his drawings to make the next observations. Perhaps because a very central event underpinning the coming into existence of the fundamental fantasy is not amenable to demonstration in this way. That event is the encounter with the failure of the big Other. Given the level of abstraction we have endured thus far it is interesting at this point to see Lacan turning to the imaginary and vaulting us back to the middle lessons of this seminar where the St. Augustine anecdote is cited to illustrate the moment when the subject is going to conquer the second 'essential' dimension via frustration. This, surprisingly, itself implies a torus structure since according to Lacan-it constitutes the existence of loops ... irreducible to a point, of non-vanishing loops' (158). However, what gives the St. Augustine anecdote its power is the weight of devastation it implies. A devastation strongly marked in Lacan's words when he recounts how at the moment when the onlooking child sees the other baby at his mother's breast 'there was suddenly produced for him ... in the light signaled by his mortal pallor ... the something new which is desire, the desire of the object as such insofar as it resonates to the very foundation of the subject, that it shakes him well beyond his constitution as satisfied or not, as suddenly menaced in his innermost being'. Lacan is explicit in designating this happening as 'This point of the birth of desire' (159).

Since at this stage near the end of the seminar we are trying both to understand and to assess the efficaciousness of Lacan's topological demonstrations, it might be useful to recall how this same process — the coming into being of the fundamental fantasy and the articulation of the structure of desire — is described in the seminar on Desire. The fundamental fantasy there is the outcome of a very real and concrete drama that occurs not on the drawing board but in the life of a baby. And the intricacies of demand that provoke this drama are spelled out in terms of real life. As Lacan says in Lessons Twenty and Twenty-one; 'nothing is more real and concrete than this' (374). Given the arduous intellectual exercises we have just come through it is striking to revisit this emphasis; I quote: it is to the degree that the child's demand begins to be articulated that the whole process begins ...'. At this point the Other is the real Other who responds to the demand. Lacan names this Other as mother and as he often does, gestures to the enormous emotional complexities involved, and the manner in which a need for food becomes also a demand for love. This is the initial stage. The next stage he says is when the subject questions this Other and encounters its failure to adequately respond, and it is this point that Lacan designates as 'the first stage in the actual constitution of the subject' 375. Here we

have the subject *in statu nascendi*, the subject as pure question, encountering in the Other the hollow or empty space' revealing 'that no possible signifier can guarantee the authenticity of the series of signifiers'. A discovery that menaces his existence to such a degree that in order to go on being, he must prop himself up with something he brings in from elsewhere — a part of himself that is involved in the imaginary relationship to the other. Here in its first occurrence is that which will eventually be the o-object. Lacan is explicit; this is o — an essential prop that keeps the subject from being cancelled out.

The reason I am being so repetitive in citing Desire is to lean on the concreteness and immediacy of what is being said, on the fact that the language used is the language of pain, crisis, existential menace. And the o-object that comes to the rescue of the subject has the closest possible relation with narcissistic passion. This changes in Identification. Here in Lesson Twenty-four he clarifies a distinction between the two but one that is also an intrication. As he had said earlier it is essential that the o-object be masked in order for the Symbolic to function and here he specifies — narcissism *is* this mask. 'One could say that the libidinal structure insofar as it is marked by the narcissistic structure is what covers and masks the relationship to the object for us' (321). As he goes on to say, there is a structural relation between the two. Our lives of love, hate, ecstasy and despair take their weight from what is hidden behind each of these dramas because of this structural relationship to the fundamental fantasy. Lacan describes this relationship as not just structural but using a word that is not customary for him as 'complementary', a notation that ushers in a new and surprising assertion, that there are in fact two imaginaries — a true and a false, a statement repeated a year later in Anxiety. Very little is said about the true — just one sentence; the true imaginary function is a privileged relationship with o the object of desire. The other one, the false, is the domain of error, of the lure, the misrecognition, that Lacan talked about at the end of the last lecture, the structural asymmetry which means that we spend our lives trying to re-find the lost object but always in the wrong place.

But maybe lure is where it is at. Without lure, seduction, attraction, what would our lives be? And lure is linked indissolubly to this o-object. I quote; 'It is insofar as the narcissistic relationship to the image of the body is linked by something structural to the fundamental fantasy that it takes all its weight ... insofar as it finds a certain support which is a lure, an error that it has its indirect relationship to the fundamental fantasy which is behind it' (321). And what follows this massive statement in Lesson Twenty-four is an even more massive one — a kind of recapitulation of the entire seminar. If you look at the syntax you will see that Lacan takes a run at this sentence three or four times before he can complete it. You might remember, too, that in the first lecture I quoted this sentence as a kind of handrail to hold onto while making our way through this difficult seminar. Once again what is in question is the fundamental deficiency of the Other as locus of the word. It is because of this — the relationship between this o and the lack of the Other that the mask must remain in place. Otherwise everything is effaced in the signifying function in face of the eruption of this object' (322). Over and over in the seminar the drama of the subject's encounter with the lack in the Other is invoked as foundational. So much so that the different modalities available to the subject in response, can be named neurotic, perverse, psychotic., described here as normal faces of the same structure (322), the normal terms of the constitution of desire (331).

The last pages of this lesson address the question of the privileged point he has been targeting in the drawings of the previous pages. Gesturing back to the previous year and the agalma Alcibiades found in Socrates allows Lacan to describe this agalma not as the o-object itself but as something that has 'more than a tiny relationship with this central point that gives its accent, its dignity to the o-object' (325). This central point is the phallus very weirdly described as both enveloped and enveloping. Readers of Desire might remember a strange moment in Lesson Twenty when Lacan, having asked the question What is the phallus? goes on to describe what he explicitly terms an evagination, a turning inside out of the vagina (369), indicating that 'the phallus presents itself here in a radical form inasmuch as its function, in the end, is to show on the outside what is in the subject's inside'. 'Inside

out, extirpated...? Does the poor Lacanian penis/phallus ever plaintively ask; do I have to do *everything* around here?! However the really interesting factor is that what Alcibiades wanted was to see Socrates desiring; 'this most radical subjective implication at the heart of the object itself'. The erect phallus is a very good symbol of desiring-ness, though of course not the only one. And that phrase 'the most radical subjective implication at the heart of the object' (325) places desiring-ness at the heart of this object thereby making of it something other than mere object.

As the year draws to a close, Lacan commences the penultimate lesson, Lesson Twenty-five, by returning his audience to Freud's three types of identification and by lining up his topological drawings with the second and third of these. Having begun with Freud's second mode — hysterical identification generally discernible only via a single trait, Lacan feels able 'without false modesty', he says, to assert that his own exposition of this unary trait is the definitive one. It is unlikely that Freud would agree. What he Freud described was far less momentous. Certainly, like Lacan's reading it is the outcome of object-choice, but the drama implied by Freud appears less crucial than the encounter with the lost object in which the unary trait is born in Lacan's account. In terms of the question; what unifies the subject, the answer offered here as a model in the third form of identification is an effective example: 'my unary trait is reflected in the unicity of the model that functions as the collective identity of the crowd ...' (329). The very first identification for Freud is that which belongs to the subject's pre-history and something of this mysterious first is discernible in the third form, in this model of identification to the leader. Here Lacan breaks off, indicating that to develop this point further he would have had to shift his focus to a study of *Totem and Taboo*, named as Freud's legacy, but already recognised as closer to phantasy than to the facts believed in by Freud. A full discussion of *Totem and Taboo* in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* [Seminar XVII] is worth reading in this context.

This remark about its status as phantasy brings Lacan to the pith of the year's teaching already encountered in Lesson Nineteen the last day; the structure of the fundamental phantasy as central to the topic of *Identification*. What will be highlighted in this lesson is the interchangeability of barred S and o in the phantasy, introduced with an admirably clear Freudian definition of the object as 'this secret and perhaps never in the last analysis accessible point' citing Freud's irreducible *Urverdrängung* located in the navel of the dream.

As readers will note, the call to arms, addressed to practising analysts, which now follows, often appears at the end of the year's seminar. Very interestingly Lacan here warns his listeners against the platitudes all too often generated by clinical discussion, mocking certain therapeutic goals — become what you are — measured against the inevitability of reckoning with the unconscious — What is certain is that you become what you miscognize — not good news! The singularity of psychoanalytic truth — once again here distinguished from the notable insights of great writers such as Lévi-Strauss and Heidegger recently praised — this singularity insists that at the heart of the constitution of every object there is the libido. If as analysts we water down the implications of this fact into doxas of adaptation, our work amounts to a misappropriation of funds (334). Here therapeutic success is to be assessed in two different ways; 'either we have achieved it outside any properly analytic path, and in that case what was amiss at the heart of the affair — because this is what is in question — is still amiss, or we have been elsewhere around what was amiss, what was happening at the centre, the libidinal knot' (334). This rather stark alternative forms the backdrop to the question; 'when do we manage to replace a subject in his desire?'

But what do we even mean by that question? While I might be tempted to see it as a rhetorical question, Lacan most certainly does not. It turns out he has spent the previous weekend examining key texts of the Muslim and Hindu mystical tradition looking for evidence of the o-object as 'the indispensable turning point' in the subjective realisation that is in question' (335). How not to be impressed? What seems to emerge from this thoroughness is again the interchangeability of subject

and object, desirer and desired; 'the involution, the assumption of the subject into an object' which Lacan sees as coinciding perfectly with the formula for the fundamental fantasy.

What follows on this is a brilliant tour de force, not necessarily entirely convincing but hugely impressive — Lacan reads the Wolfman's iconic dream as a bodying forth of the position of the barred subject in the fundamental fantasy. A brief topological introduction, once again illustrating a structuring inversion followed by the extraordinary account of the Wolfman's dream where as he says, it is not the Wolfman's specular image that is there before him, but rather 'the very image of that moment that the subject experiences as the primal scene ... so not the primal scene itself but the structure of the subject in front of that scene, the return of what he essentially is in the fundamental fantasy' (337). In itself this is a stellar reading, but more excitingly it implies that the o-object although non-specular is not altogether outside the domain of image; 'this object can be found at this frontier zone in function of the images of the subject ... in the mirror which the big Other constitutes, ... the space developed by the big Other'. In the last session of the year Lacan will come back again to extending the concept of image to include evocations of the non-specular o-object. Gesturing to a version of the image that is closer to the uncanny than the usual mirror image as it has appeared in his teaching. As he says, something can appear beyond the image that the clear mirror gives (350). This is actually quite an important rectification in Lacan's thinking. His earlier conception of the imaginary, apparently influenced by eighteenth and nineteenth century ideas relied too much on completeness and coherence. Compared to say the splintered imaginary as it appears in *Finnegans Wake*. Something closer to this is now being evoked.

In a novel by Maurice Blanchot Lacan finds something that 'incarnates the image of *o*'. And not what one might have expected. The desire at the central point of this o-object has been in question for some time. Did we see a poetic version of it in *Transference with the hand that reaches out from the flame?*. And the insistence that the agama sought in Socrates was not just Socrates as desired, but Socrates desiring. In which seminar does he say that being told that someone desires you against their will, is the most powerful of aphrodisiacs? But the sensation of this desire as he says here, is also experienced as anxiety. What Blanchot describes in the excerpt Lacan reads to his audience is a horrifying inversion of the passion for the written word, an absorption and a captivation that becomes literal, putting the rapt reader at the mercy of the raptor; 'He read with an unsurpassable minuteness and attention.' But this powerful attraction starts to become a two way thing; 'the words, issuing from a book, took on there a mortal power, exercised on the look which touched them a soft and peaceful attraction' Initially 'being glimpsed by the intimacy of the word' is pleasurable, but bit by bit the reader becomes aware of the strangeness of 'being observed by a word as if it was a living being' (351), becomes invaded, infiltrated, assaulted by the word which has metamorphosed into a gigantic rat. The horror of the scene is not this attack per se but the inextricability of a mutually devouring desire; 'he could not escape from the desire to devour it,, to draw it Into the most profound intimacy with himself ... sometimes the other devoured him in his turn, dragged him back through the hole through which it had come ...' (352).

What an enactment! Again no way that it could be conveyed with the help of a cross-cap.

The final lesson is wonderful, repeating many of the points just made, but full of resonant poetic statements about the illusion, the phantasm of the world. The o-object is defined as '*being* insofar as it is missing from the text of the world'. Its occultation is what gives us our world and when for whatever reason that occultation fails, our foothold in reality also fails, the world as we know it founders. After so much abstraction the reader is brought face to face with the kernel of this seminar, which is that to address the topic of identification is to question the fundamental fantasy, what Lacan here calls fantastical identification (345), and in particular to recognize at its heart this organising object, the o-object here described as the object of castration. Really? Can the object of castration be anything other

than the penis/phallus? In Desire Lacan was clearly making a distinction — o was the *effect* not the object of castration. But now some kind of morphing is taking place. Given how often we have encountered this o-object as the prop which the subject has drawn from his own imaginary substance to keep him from disappearing it comes as a baffling concept to find the event which provokes this drama to be ‘the phallic point’. What is phallic about the point where every significance is abolished, at the nodal point called that of the desire of the Other? When one calls to mind the description of the phallus in Seminar V [*Formations of the Unconscious*] as the single signifier upholding the whole world of meaning’ (12/02/1958. p. 173) one cannot but ask; how come it now has the opposite function since it signifies the abolition as such of all significance? Confusing stuff.

There is a luminosity in this last lesson that is very pleasing, but given the efforts Lacan has made throughout the entire year to stretch our modes of thought, to render impassible the usual ruts along which our assumptions flow I am wary of my pleasure here. As stated earlier it reads very well as a version of Freud’s *Urverdrängung*. ‘The entire world’, Lacan tells us ‘is ordered in a certain fashion which gives us the illusion of being a world’ (347). Badiou repeats this observation when he speaks of ‘the mythic narrative which delivers us the phantasm of the world’. But the condition that permits this illusion to subsist is the enucleation of the object of desire as shown in previous topological drawings. This fundamental truth has of course not been entirely invisible throughout the history of thought, and Goethe is cited as allowing us to see ‘the identification of the object of desire to what must be renounced in order for the world as world should be delivered to us’ (348). Am I being lured into missing the specificity of what Lacan is saying here?

The poetry and the intensity with which it is said awaken echoes of the Seminar on Desire where this o-object was unambiguously identified with the suffering of being (remember Beckett’s distinction between the boredom of living and the suffering of being and the manner in which great art tears a hole in one in order to reveal the other)? Here in the final lesson of this seminar the o-object is ‘being insofar as it is missing in the text of the world’ (349). And yet its function is somewhat akin to the seal stamped on a letter by the sender. It is my mark, signifying nothing else except this fact. A seal represents the subject, the sender’ (347). The o-object then is structured like this seal. So is it *the* mark of who I am — this moment of an impossible dereliction repressed in order to go on living, but conditioning all of that living? Rather surprisingly, using the vocabulary of established theory Lacan says of it; this is what psychoanalysis calls the partial object designating the point of repression because of its loss’ (349). Spelling out the relation to specular reality, the world we live in, he states that ‘it is starting from there that there takes root the illusion of the cosmicity of the world’. It is this point of origin that must be kept in mind; ‘this a-cosmic point of desire’ (349) since this is ‘at the centre of every elaboration of what we have to accumulate as facts concerning the elaboration of the objective world’. Lacan repeatedly refers to this relation as a complementary one. And asks; In the specular illusion, in the fundamental misrecognition with which we always have to deal does ‘o’ take on the function of specular image as $i(o)$, even though it has no similarity with it? A riveting question and one that many readers have assumed the answer to be at least a qualified yes. However it is not quite so straightforward; if S barred is something, it is not the complement of $I(o)$, and using a term that will become central in next year’s seminar, *Anxiety*, Lacan completes this sentence by adding ‘it could just as well be the cause of it’. So not the complement, the cause. Although the definition of the o-object had once or twice been object cause of desire in Seminar VI, it will really come into its own as *the* definition in the coming year.

The world as illusion is not a new idea. But psychoanalysis offers a take on this view which is different to that of philosophy or religion. Freud’s *Urverdrängung* creates a foothold for what Lacan has been trying to explore throughout this seminar and which is hammered home in the final session; the o-object is the kernel of the subject’s identity, entirely interchangeable with the barred subject in the fantasy, a point already made in [the Seminar on] Desire. ‘How can we not give this object — that

which arises at the point of failure of the Other ... its reflexive property? It is from here that everything starts. It is inasmuch as the subject is first of all and uniquely cut of this object that something can be born which is consciousness of self' (349). Desire had already signaled the interchangeability of barred S and o in the fantasy, As he said then, the subject's assumption involves the o-object, insisting that this is just as legitimate as to show that it involves the barred subject (366). He makes the same point here; but foregrounding the o-object even more starkly 'Small o is being insofar as it manifests as missing from the text the world' (349). And 'around this o there can slide everything that is called the return of the repressed'. In Lacan's wonderful phrase the whole of humanity, the whole of humanism is there to make us miss it (this object of desire). But, as he still more powerfully puts it, nothing else counts.; We know from our experience that nothing has any veritable weight in the world except something that makes an allusion to this object of which the Other, big O takes the place in order to give it a meaning' (350).

The language here is noteworthy — intense, evocative, weighted with the longings and impossibilities of the human condition — much closer it would seem to the coalface of psychoanalytic practice than the interlocking tori of earlier lessons. Once again as he had done in *Desire* Lacan evokes the lostness of the lost object, the unchanging fact that all of our living, our longing, our striving can never make up for this fundamental loss. In *Desire* he had stated that 'Nothing real on the side of the Other can make up for this,, except by a series of additions ... that will never be exhausted' (372). Here he points out that 'every metaphor, including that of the symptom tries to make this object emerge in its signification, but all the pullulations of meaning that it may engender never manage to staunch what is involved in this hole in terms of a central loss' (350). Listen to how this echoes *Desire*, 'The Other will manifest himself to the subject over the course of his entire existence, through gifts or refusals. But that will never be situated anywhere other than in the margins of the fundamental lack that is itself found at the level of the signifier.. The subject will be historically invested in all sorts of experiences with the Other, but none of that will be able to exhaust the lack that exists at the level of the signifier ...' (372).

Identification as examined by Freud does imply this intensity since what occurs is a devolution of object choice, otherwise known as one's first loves. But the freudian vocabulary is dry and matter of fact. Lacan's middle seminars often follow an extraordinarily sinuous and centrifugal path in order to return us each time to freudian orthodoxy, so Freud might have balked at this seminar, but Lacan is actually saying much the same thing albeit with a very different inflection.

If you remember, the opening moves this year seemed to imply a denigration of, and a distancing from the imaginary in Lacan's thinking. Now at the end he comes back again to emphasizing the domain of this imaginary, the place where all these dramas take place. The question is a deeply interesting one. What exactly is the relationship of small o to the imaginary reflection which covers and surmounts it? One of complementarity, of analogy? Is there a way of accessing the o-object other than *via* I(o), or is this detour 'the only road that is open to us to discover the incidence of o, one where we first of all encounter the mark of the occultation of the big Other' (350)? This is a question respecting the limits of representation itself, and one that ties Lacan's thought into that of contemporary philosophy and contemporary literature.

Rather unusually Lacan now sums up the year's work; 'I(o) and o, their difference, their complementarity, and the mask that one constitutes for the other, this is where I have led you this year' (353). A continuation and an extension of the seminar on *desire* then, but going quite a bit further. In *Desire* he had said of the o-object; it is image and it is pathos. Here he specifies, 'its image is not its image, it does not represent it, this object of castration' (353). The sentences where he expands this statement are not at all clear. Who or what is the desirer here? The formula for the fundamental phantasy implies a desirer in the diamond linking S barred to o, and once again this is situated in a

position analogous to that of the specular image. At this point Lacan asks a highly peculiar question; can we make of this desirer purely and simply the agent of desire (353)? Is it more or other than this? The question which had kicked off the seminar on desire, the *che vuoi*, translates as what do you want not who wants. The desirer is the response — let's say Alcibiades' response — he wants Socrates, but Socrates as the desirer. The o-object contains a desirer. What I want in the phantasy determines this object and Lacan urges us; look for him always, this desirer at the core of any object of desire (353). The desirer that this object contains must avow himself as desirer. How? The example suggested is an extraordinary one that of the necrophilic embrace, where what I embraced is an ungraspable truth (353). Is he thinking of Georges Bataille?

So it turns out that this whole seminar with its title Identification, has been about the o-object. Lacan's last sentence on the topic is definitive, and addressed directly to the psychoanalysts in his audience. This o-object is in fact the object of our science in the same way that number or quantity may be the object of mathematics. At the end of a long seminar that seemed to meander in many directions, this last sentence cuts with unadorned clarity to its central message. And signals the continuation of this topic in the title of next year's Seminar, *Anxiety*.