Presentation of the Theme for the 2027 NLS Congress

by Éric Zuliani

Fantasmatic Scenarios

I propose that we spend the coming year examining: Fantasmatic Scenarios.

This is a clinical approach to the question of the fantasy, which, in our field, occupies a paradoxical position, as we rarely mention it, whether in the course of an analytic experience or at our events. Let us note, however, the recent publication of an issue of *La Cause du désir*, entitled "Fantasme." If the fantasy takes on such importance at the end of an analysis when we speak of its traversal, in what form does it present itself in the course of analytic work, and what is its function?

We will not set out from the formula of the fantasy that you know, $ ◇ *a*, but rather from an exploration of fantasmatic scenarios in analysis and in civilization. This will provide an opportunity to know more about the subject of the unconscious in its relations to this object *a*.

An Image Set to Work in the Signifying Structure

The *scenario*, in its cinematic sense, is a written and detailed framework, a pre-established breakdown that will give a film its structure before editing provides a version of it. The fantasmatic scenario does not simply belong to the imagination: the "image is set to work in the signifying structure,"[1] according

[1] Lacan J., "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power," *Écrits*, tr. B. Fink, New York & London, Norton, 2006, p. 532.

to Lacan's definition of the fantasy in "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power," which is what helps us find our bearings in imaginary productions – those of Little Hans, for example.

Thus, as Jacques-Alain Miller noted on the occasion of the publication of the Seminar, *The Logic of Fantasy*, we can understand fantasy, first as a solitary reverie, a daydream with a sometimes-consoling aspect, and secondly, "as a means of jouissance —solitary there as well."[2] Here, the image, word, sentence and scenario are at the subject's disposal and support masturbation, a sexual activity to which Freud devoted particular attention, and which has been modified with the advent of pornography. J.-A. Miller specifies a third sense, which is "more complex: the unconscious fantasy, the so-called *fundamental* fantasy [which] provides the frame for the whole of the subject's mental life and [which] reveals itself in the course of the treatment."[3] These fantasmatic scenarios, experienced in a solitary way, are therefore difficult to communicate in analysis, the subject being more inclined to speak of their symptoms. That the fantasy reveals itself in the course of the treatment indicates that it is not simply a matter of speech and its interpretation: for Freud, it is constructed.

Beyond what has to do with the signifying articulation, $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$, taking an interest in fantasy means shedding light on what proceeds from the formula: $\$ \diamond a$.

The Scope of Fantasmatic Scenarios

At the last WAP Congress, J.-A. Miller reminded us that one can catch a glimpse of the fantasy as soon as a subject comes to consult us. Why? Because something of this fantasy has been shaken, placing the subject in a position to ask for an interpretation. Let's take the example of the first stages of the Rat

[2] Miller, J.-A., "Propos sur *La Logique du fantasme*," *La Cause du désir*, No. 114, June 2023, p. 69.
[3] *Ibid.*

Man's treatment in order to glimpse the scope of what is meant by a fantasmatic scenario.

The Rat Man is first caught up in an initial scenario with perverse overtones—that of the rat torture, which exerts a powerful effect on him. A second, equally fantasmatic scenario is that of the labyrinthine circuit of a debt that cannot be repaid. A third, finally, is played out on the transferential stage, including Freud in the figure of the cruel captain.

So, we could say that this is *an enactment of the sexual reality of the unconscious*. Freud is attentive to this, as he notes that for the Rat Man, "it was only along the painful road of transference that he was able to reach a conviction that his relation to his father really necessitated the postulation of this unconscious complement,"[4] of his feelings—hatred in particular. This is why Lacan can say that "to bring the patient to his original fantasy is not to teach him anything; it is to learn from him how to do it. As regards object *a* in its relation to the division of the subject—the patient is the one who knows how to do with it, while we occupy the place of the result, insofar as we facilitate it."[5]

Glimpsed and Implied [Entrevu et sous-entendu]

From the very beginning of his discovery, Freud took an interest in symptoms linked to sexuality, without overlooking what he qualified as the fantasy that serves as a support for this sexuality. In the *Letters to Fliess*, he examines these scenarios in connection with dreams, tracing them back to infantile sources, and locating them in neurosis as well as in paranoia.

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[4] Freud S., "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," *S.E.* X, tr. J. Strachey, London, Hogarth, 1955, p. 209.

[5] Lacan J., *Le Séminaire,* livre XII*, Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse*, text established by J.-A. Miller, Paris, Seuil, 2025, p. 297.

What is decisive is that he relates them to desire, and not primarily to reality. Indeed, with the abandonment of his *Neurotica*, the fantasy assumes a central place in relation to effective reality: psychic reality then becomes the determining factor, where event and fantasy are interwoven.[6]

Concerning the fantasy's infantile roots, Freud emphasizes the importance of what is heard and what is seen in their constitution, foreshadowing the two drive objects at stake: the voice and the gaze. More precisely, these fantasmatic scenarios contain what is implied [*sous-entendu*], what is half-glimpsed [*entrevu*], that is to say, something that exceeds what was seen or heard, as in fetishism or the primal scene. These fantasmatic formations remain fixed in the subject's mental life and struggle to emerge in the analytic session. Taking an interest in the fantasy therefore means extending our attention beyond what structures clinical practice, namely the symptom. Supplementing the symptom with the identification of fantasmatic scenarios leads us to consider the articulations between fantasy and symptom in their relation to drive satisfaction, hence the title of J.-A. Miller's course in Lacanian Orientation: "From Symptom to Fantasy and Back Again."[7]

The Trial of the Desire of the Other

The fantasy introduces us less to the question of reality than to the question of what can manifest itself within it: the desire of the Other, or even the Other's will to jouissance. It is this structure of a beyond—beyond the desire of the Other—from which the neurotic defends himself, as is indicated by the anxiety of the phobic, the flight of the hysteric, or the kill-the-desire of the obsessional. The desire of the Other is a "test"[8] against which the subject defends himself by all manner of fantasmatic scenarios. The hysteric

[6] Cf. Miller J.-A., "The Seminar of Barcelona on *Die Wege der Symptombildung*," tr. R. Barros, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks* (1998) 1, pp. 7-65. (Available online in the Library section of the London Society website: here.)
[7] Miller J.-A., "L'orientation lacanienne. Du symptôme au fantasme et retour," teaching delivered in the framework of the Department of Psychoanalysis, University Paris 8, 1982-83, unpublished; "Symptôme – Fantasme," *La Cause du désir*, No. 114, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
[8] Lacan J., "The Signification of the Phallus," *Écrits*, *op. cit.*, p. 582.

introduces a third party who would know how to respond to this desire of the Other, deriving jouissance from their own unsatisfied desire. The obsessional offers the Other, who demands and therefore desires, the spectacle of their impossible and thus withheld desire.

How is the fantasy conjugated in the masculine and the feminine? This question opens onto the field of love life, where the phallus beats out the measure of the pantomimes inherent in the comedy of the sexes.

Seminar VI will be an important milestone for our work. According to J.-A. Miller, it is there that Lacan elaborates his first logic of the fantasy: "There will later be *Seminar XIV*, which will bear the title *The Logic of the Fantasy*. This second logic of the fantasy [...] will be grounded in the article [...] "Position of the Unconscious," which Lacan commented on in *Seminar XI*."[9]

It is in *Seminar VI* that the fantasy is said to be fundamental, insofar as it centers on what binds the subject and the object, here the object of desire and not yet the object of the drive. The desire of the Other is not the Other, but the Other's lack, to which the subject responds through the register of the object. Going beyond the responses that this desire of the Other elicits in neurosis, psychosis, and perversion, one also grasps the importance of the function the analyst's desire assumes in the direction of the treatment. Let's illustrate this by a typical clinical sequence provided by J.-A. Miller: Any therapeutic gain achieved with respect to the symptom entails a fantasmatic emergence from which the desire of the Other manifests itself for the subject.[10] Does not this cycle, by its very movement, indicate a return to the subject's point of impasse and to the function that the analyst's desire plays, until a pass is found there?

[9] Miller J.-A., "Une introduction à la lecture du Séminaire VI, *Le désir et son interprétation*," *La Cause du désir*, No. 86, March 2014, p. 63.
[10] Miller J.-A., "Symptôme – Fantasme," *op. cit.*, p. 75.

In this Seminar, as elsewhere, proceeding from the observation that the paths of desire are perverse, Lacan develops a differential clinic of the fantasy with respect to perversion, in which either the object is sought or the subject and his division targeted. Entering "The Sadean boudoir"[11] will shed light on the ethical subversion introduced by Freud with respect to jouissance, as well as on a differential clinic of the destiny of the fantasy, to be elucidated when Lacan emphasizes that "Sade is not duped by his fantasy, insofar as the rigor of his thinking is integrated into the logic of his life."[12]

The Fantasy in the Place of the Real

The fantasy occupies a paradoxical position with regard to the real, a point Lacan underscores when he speaks of it as a screen: "It is in relation to the real that the level of fantasy functions. The real supports the fantasy; the fantasy protects *the* real."[13] Lacan does not say "protects from the real," because the fantasy both closes off and opens access to the real, where it is the drive object that is at stake. In *Seminar XIII*, Lacan refers to the painter Magritte and draws attention to his series of paintings featuring a painting within a window: "It is the image to which I resorted in order to explain what is at stake in the function of fantasy."[14] Why? Because the fantasy is as much a frame as it is a window, and the case of the Wolf Man provides a striking illustration of this.

In his life, the dream of the wolves returns three times in different forms, yet each time in reference to this double dimension of the frame and the window. This painting in the window sometimes protects from the real, and sometimes no longer protects from it—a malevolent will then manifests itself there. First,

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[11] Lacan J., "Kant with Sade," *Écrits*, *op. cit*., p. 658.
[12] *Ibid*, p. 656.
[13] Lacan J., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI,* text established by J.-A. Miller, tr. A. Sheridan, New York & London, Norton, 1998, p. 41 [translation modified]. Italics added by the author.
[14] Lacan J*., Le Séminaire*, livre XIII, *L'Objet de la psychanalyse*, text established by J.-A. Miller, Paris, Seuil, p. 337.

there is the inaugural dream of his childhood, in which only a catatonic image—catatonia of the subject himself—fixes, within a double frame—image and window—a threatening presence signaled by anxiety. Later, at the beginning of his treatment with Mack Brunswick, during an episode of paranoia the subject recounts another dream in which a pack of gray wolves threatens him. A wall separates them, but it can be crossed at any moment. At the end of the treatment, Brunswick subtly notes a rebalancing of the Wolf Man's subjectivity through the resumption of his activity as a painter, marked by a dream in which he once again sees through the window a tranquil landscape of trees, wolf free, that he would like to paint.

The fantasy, from reverie to the axiom organizing a subject's entire life, including the satisfaction it may provide him—sometimes more than his life partner does—finds its paradigm in the one isolated by Freud: *A Child Is Being Beaten*. Freud lays out its Oedipal articulation, locked in place by the love of the father, sketches the grammar of what he conceives as a sentence, and arrives at masochism. Lacan returns to this fantasy many times. These occurrences call for further study, without overlooking the sense of shame that accompanies the subject's avowal of this fantasy, so difficult to make. How does this stand today, in an age of generalized shamelessness?

Fantasies in the World

At the very end of *Seminar VI*, Lacan's remarks on sublimation will guide us in an initial direction in order to explore what art owes to the fantasy. He defines it "as the very form into which desire flows," where "the drive can ultimately be reduced to the pure play of the signifier. [...] Sublimation [...] is that by which desire and the letter can be equated. [...] [It] is placed as such at the level of the logical subject, where everything that is, strictly speaking, creative work in the realm of logos is established and unfolds. On that basis, cultural activities—with all the impacts and risks they involve, up to and

including the revamping of formerly established conformisms […] come more or less to be inserted in society."[15]

Another line of inquiry opens onto social mores, onto the modes of jouissance that exist by virtue of the sexual relation that does not exist. All kinds of fantasies compensate for it. J.-A. Miller therefore indicates that "there are no sexual norms, but there are social norms." But "wherever there are social norms, there are also anti-social norms, social norms that lie outside-the-norm, all of which participate in the same system."[16] This is an important point for exploring, within the social field, the "going off the track of our jouissance"[17] to which collective fantasies respond: the frenzied search for an identity in which "the Other is the body."[18] It is in this same chapter that Lacan also advances that "*the unconscious is politics*," adding that "what binds men together, and what pits them against one another, is to be explained by that for which we are trying […] to spell out the logic, namely the fantasy."[19]

What politics is Lacan speaking of? The politics of the symptom, which, unlike the fantasy, is not traversed at the end of an analysis. To traverse the fantasy, and beyond that, to know-how-to-do with [*savoir y faire avec*] the symptomatic remainders: the end of an analysis, is it not knotted with "this concern for the School" recently evoked by J.-A. Miller, insofar as this knowing-how-to-do, this *sinthome*, could be placed in the service of the School?

Translated by Pamela King and Phil Dravers

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[15] Lacan J., *Desire and Its Interpretation, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI*, text established by J.-A. Miller, tr. B. Fink, Cambridge, Polity, pp. 484-485.
[16] Miller J.-A., "Propos sur la logique du fantasme," *La Cause du désir*, *op. cit*., pp. 70-71.
[17] Cf. Lacan, J., "Television," *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, tr. D. Hollier, R. Krauss, A. Michelson, London & New York, Norton, 1990, p. 32 [translation modified].
[18] Lacan, J., *The Logic of the Fantasy*, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIV*, text established by J.-A. Miller, tr. A. R. Price, Cambridge, Polity, 2026, p. 245.
[19] *Ibid*., p. 250 [translation modified].