

ARE ALL ANALYSTS WOMEN?

By Doron Almagor and Clive Thomson (Toronto)

Introduction

In *Seminar X, L'angoisse*, Lacan insists that women analysts can make use of the countertransference with a certain ease and facility. Lacan notes that if "there are some people who have said something sensible about counter-transference, it is uniquely women," and as examples of this facility, he chooses Ella Sharpe, Margaret Little, Barbara Low and Lucia Tower (*Seminar X*, p.137). What are the implications of Lacan's seeming alignment of feminine sexuation, if not women themselves, with an analytically desirable countertransference? We consider the question of the countertransference, a phenomenon that is born out of the desire of the analyst, to be a vital one in furthering the praxis of psychoanalysis. Is there something in the Seminar on Anxiety that can help us with this question? And what do women have to do with it?

We are aware, of course, that the concept of the countertransference of the analyst is dropped in the later seminars. We are here presenting our reading of *Seminar X*, and use the terminology of that seminar. We hypothesize that there may be something to learn about the later concept of the desire of the analyst by looking at the prototypes of this concept.

Part One: Theoretical

It is not our intent to over simplify or to imply a universal law that stipulates women are axiomatically better analysts. To do so would elevate the category of 'Woman' to the fantasy of an Other, an Other that does not exist. Both Colette Soler and Roberto Harari state that, according to Lacan, women "understand very well what the desire of the analyst is," but that Lacan also once said that "women could be the best analysts when they are not the worst ones." Lacan appears to suggest that women may have greater latitude in their countertransference, but that this looser binding may also lead them astray. We also do not believe that Lacan is referring necessarily to anatomical women. However, our reading of *Langoisse* would indicate that feminine sexuation is not without a relationship to the contingency of anatomy. Our question, "Are All Analysts Women?" cannot be taken as a literal one however, as they are evidently not. We would like to examine the relationship that Lacan poses, for better or for worse, between femininity and countertransference.

From a somewhat different perspective, these same questions regarding the desire of the analyst were approached at this colloquium two years ago in the panel presentations by Susy Roizin, Daphne Tamarin, Nestor Tamarin, and Daphne Benzaken. In their presentation concerning Lacan's *Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Daphne and Nestor Tamarin articulated the question of the countertransference of the analyst and placed it at a moment of suspension from signification that leads to "a lack which allows a response in recourse to action, the constitution of a desire, the desire of the analyst." If, together with Lacan, we find a relationship between lack and femininity, then we can note that at least as early as *Seminar VII*, Lacan had made a link between female sexuation and what might be construed as the desire proper to the analyst.

To continue to build our case, can we say that it is in *Seminar X*, the seminar that is orientated towards the affect of the Real, that marks a fundamental cut in the evolution of Lacan's spoken word? This is the

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cut between Lacan, the analyst of the signifier, and Lacan, the analyst of the suspension of signification. It is the cut between the Lacan who wishes to return psychoanalysis to the Freud of the pleasure principle and the Lacan who wishes to separate and disentangle psychoanalysis from Freud. Or perhaps return to a Freud that Freud could conceive of beyond himself, a return to the Freud of the death drive and to what is beyond the pleasure principle. Throughout the seminar, we can see how the question of *angoisse* leads to another question, the question of the lack, of what is beyond the limit of anxiety. By placing his goal beyond of this limit, it can be said that the seminar marks the point at which Lacan breaks with the termination point denoted by the name of Freud. From that point on, the bedrock of castration is no longer the *nec plus ultra* of analysis. As Lacan notes in the seminar, "this term of castration complex, that Freud gives us as final in the man, he tells us, and of *Penisneid* in the woman, can be put in question. It is not necessary that it should be final" (p. 119). Lacan closes the Seminar of 1963 by announcing that, "I have often questioned you about what the desire of the analyst should be in order that, there where we are trying to push things beyond the limit of anxiety, work is possible. Undoubtedly it is fitting that the analyst should be one who has been able, however little it may be, from some angle, from some tack, to make his desire sufficiently enter into this irreducible o (the *objet petit a*) to offer to the question of the concept of anxiety a real guarantee" (p. 305). This is the guarantee of the alterity of the Other and the subject's place within the social link.

While most commentators in English (see, for example, Grigg) have placed Lacan's turn away from the guarantee of the Oedipus complex at the much later seminar on the discourses, the transfer of the guarantee from the Oedipus complex to the *objet a* is clearly evident in our reading of *Seminar X*. This change in emphasis in Lacan's analysis from an analysis based in the universal of phallic desire, to analysis within the singularity of the not-all of feminine sexuation is, of course, developed more fully in *Seminar XVIII, L'Envers de la Psychanalyse* and *Seminar XX, Encore*. But, the introduction of the object cause of desire,

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which is not a signifier, the beginning formalizations of topology, and the alignment of feminine sexuality with the desire of the analyst, all mark *L'angoisse* as the point at which Lacan moves beyond the Freudian and Levi-Straussian Oedipal structures of analysis. Lacan's movement is consistent with his overall trajectory and his wish to disentangle psychoanalysis from the prescriptions of ego identifications that had dominated the praxis in the name of Freud.

Hence, anxiety in the seminar is a signal anxiety, located in the ego, but leading elsewhere: to the lack and the *objet a*. In *Seminar X* we learn that the *objet a* is not open to symbolization, as it is what falls out of the signifying chain. It is not quite in the register of the imaginary either; like the edges of the Moebius strip that Lacan compares it to in the seminar, it cannot be reflected. The *objet a* is brought forth in the seminar as that which drops out of the Other, maintains a link to the Other, and guarantees its alterity, but not its identification.

This leads to our proposal: that here Lacan is designating a way in which the desire of the analyst can be oriented in order to move beyond the dead ends of phallic and Oedipal identifications and that Lacan marks this path through his naming of these special abilities in women analysts. Lacan may be proposing that where these women analysts were able to tread, Freud, because of his anatomy or sexuation, could not. Unlike Freud, for whom desire was limited by its entrenchment in the paternal metaphor, these women analysts are able to suspend themselves from signification. The woman analyst lacks nothing and does not depend on a negativized phallus and desire in order to maintain a link to the Other. She is hence more open to *jouissance* and able to loosen herself from the shackles of signification in her countertransference.

In *Seminar X*, Lacan notes Freud's limitations in his treatments with women analysands. Lacan attributes Freud's failures with Dora and the woman in the case of feminine homosexuality, both iconic cases in the psychoanalytic literature on Freud's countertransference towards women, to "precisely in the measure, that he (Freud), remained for his analysand the seat, the locus of this partial object" (p. 81). Freud insists

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to Dora that she is in love with Herr K., thus defining her within the construct of genital heterosexuality. In doing so, he remains within an Oedipal construct and relates to Dora within the dual dimension of identification and demand. As a parallel, we can say that Freud's very question, "What do women want?" is a repetition of his insistence on signification. Is the scene of this question, "What do women want?" not that of Freud facing the praying mantis described by Lacan in *Seminar X*, with Freud asking the praying mantis: "what do you want of me?" (p. 72)

We shall now turn to one of our own cases.

Part Two: Clinical

CLINICAL VIGNETTE:

English Translation of Clinical Vignette (See Appendix for the original French text of the vignette)

(...)

W: Canadians are so conformist! When I see young girls walking in the street here, walking with practically no clothes on, I imagine men must be always looking sideways at them, not knowing where to look first.

C: Conformist when it comes to clothes?

W: Yes, and their values too. But you also have homosexual marriage, or homosexual unions. When I was growing up, it was so different. I remember one day, my sister and I were walking in the street in Lyon near where we lived, and we saw a boy and a girl kissing, right in front of our house. We were embarrassed and ran away.

C: What surprised you about the two boys kissing ... I mean the boy and the girl kissing in the street?

W: Because in in our family, you don't do that. Boys and girls aren't even allowed to walk in the street together. It doesn't happen that way. A pregnant woman covers herself up, so that no one can know she slept with

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her husband. If there was any kissing on television, my mother made us turn the television off.

(...)

At the beginning of the next session:

W: I've been thinking about the slip you made yesterday.

C: When I said two boys kissing ...

W: Yes. I suppose you need to examine what your unconscious was doing there? (SMILE) I'd rather the analyst's unconscious didn't enter into it here. It would be much better if you were just neutral.

C: We can always hypothesize about slips ...

(...)

One month later:

(...)

W: I've been thinking about the slip you made, two boys kissing. It was a lesson in tolerance for me. As you said, all we can do is make hypotheses about them.

(...)

DISCUSSION:

The kissing scene recounted by W is a scene about love and many other things. It's a scene about demand, jouissance, the body, and something hidden —hidden desire, love under cover. What is love? That about which we cannot speak, as Lacan indicated in *Seminar XX*: "... what I say about love, it's precisely that we can't speak about it" (p.17). I place this kissing scene, therefore, under the double sign of love and desire.

The focus of our brief discussion of this clinical material will be the role played by anxiety, feminine desire, and transference. My effort in discussing one synchronic moment in a very long treatment is to try to put us at the heart of the experience of transference. And

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what is it that might be at the heart of transference? Perhaps love. This is what Lacan tells us: "For if love is giving what you don't have, it is certainly true that the subject can wait to be given it, since the psychoanalyst has nothing else to give him. But he does not even give him this nothing ..."¹

My sudden slip of the tongue brought forth a rush of anxiety into the session. The transcription of the exchange cannot convey the massive sense of bewilderment ('sidération') that I experienced and that was followed, a second later, by the unmistakable anxiety I saw sitting in the chair opposite me. Here is Lacan's basic tenet about anxiety: "... the true substance of anxiety, it's what doesn't deceive, the beyond-doubt" (*Seminar X*, p. 92).

During the month that preceded my slip, the analytic sessions were tense and burdensome. W constantly put me on my guard, accusing me of doing my psychoanalytic thing, wasting her time, being a voyeur, causing her to fall apart, enjoying her misery, making her financial difficulties worse, etc. I heaved a sign of relief each time she left the consulting room, feeling lucky to have survived another session with her.

My slip (and the 'sidération' that followed) brought about a shift in the course and direction of the treatment, in the sense that W, after mulling over the slip for about a month, came to the sessions in a different frame of mind and, perhaps more importantly, with a different voice. She said: "*It was a lesson in tolerance for me.*" W allowed herself, for the first time, to talk about her dreams. Before this, she told me she had had dreams about me but couldn't bring herself to talk about them in our sessions. Prior to this episode, she would say: "*I had a dream about you last night, but I'm not going to tell you about it.*" I noticed that the quality of her voice changed. Is this a sign that a different phase in the analysis was about to begin? The anxiety was transformative, perhaps even radically transformative. How did this happen?

1. J. LACAN. "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power," *Écrits*, p. 516.

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How is it that anxiety can make a difference? Lacan's disussion of articles by Margaret Little, Lucia Tower, and Barbara Low provides us with some partial answers to these questions. I believe that my case is both similar to and different from the cases discussed by Lacan. Lacan states in *Seminar X* that Barbara Low's article is the "most remarkable" of all the articles by women that he mentions. What is it about the Low article that attracted his attention? We will come back to this question in our Conclusion.

A first important point needs to be made about this clinical material. My analysand is right. Slips are made of words and they signify. "Two boys kissing" is a signifier that negates, affirms, and transforms. It pushes "a boy and a girl kissing" out of the session and brings something else into the room. What is the relation of this signifier —my slip— to anxiety? To be precise, we can say that the slip does not produce anxiety because fluctuations in anxiety do not depend on signifiers (or words) *as such*. Anxiety has to do, rather, with the object and the real. The signifier *as such* is not an index of anxiety.

A second essential point relates to the object and the real. Something had been trying to climb up onto the stage of my sessions with W during the time that preceded my slip. Like the letter that always arrives at its destination, this something wouldn't stay quietly in the wings any longer. What we learn from *Seminar X* is that anxiety is the typical affect of the advent of the real. How can we talk about the real in this clinical material? Slips, like witticisms, are an encounter with the real, in the sense that my slip, followed by the encounter of two silent, anxious gazes, occurs because I'm not thinking, or rather, because a hole or a gap or a silence in thinking takes place. As is mentioned in Part One above, this moment could also be seen as a suspension of signification. Lacan frequently emphasized how thinking is a form of undoing: "I don't claim to teach psychoanalysts what thinking is. They know ... In truth, to analysts thought is an action that undoes itself."²

2. *Ibid.*, p. 514

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Could we say that, in this moment, thinking came undone, fell, even failed. Lacan wrote that: "What we must say is: I am not, where I am the plaything of my thought; I think about what I am where I do not think I am thinking."³ The undoing in thinking allows the real of the unconscious to burst onto the stage and make its voice heard.

My response ("*We can always hypothesize about slips...*") is a not so subtle effort to return to the position of phallic knowledge. What I seem to be saying is: "Do you want to give me your interpretation of my slip?" In one sense, I am saying: "Yes, let's try to stay in this moment of not-thinking," but it is clear that I am also saying: "No, let's flee this anxiety-producing moment and return to the safer ground of the thinking." And W is only too willing to follow my lead, as her comment at the beginning of the next session indicates (She says: "*I suppose you need to examine what your unconscious was doing there.*") I think that W's comment allows us a glimpse of her need to be constantly on guard and vigilant with me. Is she positioning me as the analyst who is supposed to know and the analyst who signifies and examines "what my unconscious was doing there"?

Can we go further with this material? We can try. I show W my anxiety in the moment following the slip. In saying "*I suppose you need to examine what your unconscious was doing there,*" is W really turning the tables on her analyst and retreating into the safe position of (phallic) knowledge? Is her *demande* a way of maintaining distance from the real and *objet a*? Probably. I think she is also interrogating the analyst about his relation to the feminine and to *objet a*, in light of his slip which turns a heterosexual scene ("*a boy and a girl kissing*") into a homosexual one ("*two boys kissing*"). A month later, when W says: "*It was a lesson in tolerance for me,*" her statement might be the unconscious expression of a certain feminine *jouissance*. Is she saying: "*j'ouis, donc je jouis*" (literally, "I hear, therefore, I enjoy")?

If we take a step back from this clinical material, we could say

3. J. LACAN. "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud," *Écrits*, p. 430.

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this: to do its work, *objet a* went underground for a month following the slip. What is clear is that analysand and analyst have some sense of both being sons and daughters of language in regard to the unconscious. In other words, we were able to tolerate a slip, the anxiety it triggers, the intrusion of the real, and the slippage of the analyst from the position of the Other, that is, the analyst supposed to know. Something important and creative happens in silent, anxious moments of not-knowing, when the analyst trips up, forgets his lines, shows he has "something to spare," as Margaret Little puts it, and, most importantly, speaks the impossibility of sexuated language. We can suppose, at the very least, that *objet a* is in the process of being constituted in function of *W's demande*. As Lacan puts it: "It's in the dependency of *demande* that *objet a* is constituted for woman."⁴

And what about the lessons for the analyst? Like the cases of Little, Low and Tower, my case changes course, because of the slip and the moment of anxiety that ensued, when the analyst reorients his desire in relation to the desire of the analysand. In other words, the analyst and analysand enter into a new and differently knotted transferential relation.

My slip also functions as a cut: "... the decisive factor in the progress of the cure is linked to the introduction of the function of the cut."⁵ But my case is fundamentally different from those of the women analysts. The analyst in my case is a man. Does this clinical material suggest that all analysts can be(come) women, providing they slip up, forget their lines, and remember that the analyst's job is to give the very thing he doesn't have, not even this nothing.

Part Three

QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

At the end of our brief presentation we are still left with many

4. J. LACAN. *Seminar X*, p. 233.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

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complex questions and no good conclusions. It is our hope that the following questions, as well as the claims we make in our presentation, can now become the focus of our discussion.

Lacan touches on several topics in *Seminar X* but he does not always develop them. Lacan asks, for example, if the patient's anxiety is the same as that of the analyst, but does not answer. How can this question be developed further?

Are there other ways of reading Lacan's statements about women as 'freer' in the realm of countertransference?

The question of the effect, as we read it, remains. In "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire," (*Écrits*, article written in 1960) Lacan states that the "cut made by the signifying chain is the only cut that verifies the structure of the subject as a discontinuity in the real. If linguistics enables us to see the signifier as the determinant of the signified, analysis reveals the truth of this relationship by making holes in meanings the determinants of its discourse." The end of analysis can be said to occur when a hole is produced in the fabric of the Real, and by the production of this hole, the *objet a* is formed together with a new alterity with the Other. As Lacan continues to write in the *Écrits*, the "Father the neurotic wishes for is clearly the dead Father—that is plain to see. But he is also a Father who would be the perfect master of his desire—which would be just as good, as far as the subject is concerned. This is one of the stumbling blocks the analyst must avoid, and the crux of the interminable aspect of transference. It is why a calculated vacillation of the analyst's "neutrality" may be more valuable to a hysteric than any number of interpretations ..." Is this calculated vacillation of neutrality what helps the woman analyst to facilitate the production of this hole and the fall of the Other? To put it simply, the analysand can try but ultimately cannot hook sense or harmony into a presentation of a countertransference that is knotted to a fluctuating jouissance of the real.

Perhaps we can end our presentation by returning to Lacan's designation of Barbara Low's article as the most 'remarkable' of the women analysts he nominates. In Barbara Low's article, she states that

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"We may not, as Freud has told us, take the role of prophet, saviour, or consoler to the patient, but may we not —indeed, must we not— become the lover of the material projected by the patient and make it our introjected 'good object'?" Was this the sentence in Barbara Low's article that distinguished it for Lacan? Does it indicate, in sum, that a woman is a better analyst because she can more easily become a lover of the unconscious? And can a lover of the unconscious, an unconscious that is itself pulsational in its temporality, be anything other than vacillating?

APPENDIX:

[...]

W. — Les Canadiens... quel conformisme! Quand je vois les filles ici, qui se promènent, presque pas habillées, j'imagine que les hommes doivent toujours regarder du coin de l'œil. Ils ne savent probablement pas où poser leur regard.

C. T. — Conformistes, au niveau des vêtements?

W. — Oui, et leurs valeurs aussi. Vous avez quand même des mariages homosexuels ici, ou des unions homosexuelles. Je me souviens, quand j'étais petite, à Lyon, ma sœur et moi étions dans la rue dans notre quartier et on a vu un garçon et une fille s'embrasser? C'était juste devant chez nous. Qu'est-ce qu'on était gêné! On est parti en courant!

C. T. — Qu'est-ce qui vous a gênées quand les deux garçons... le garçon et la fille qui s'embrassaient?

W. — Parce que, dans la famille, ça ne se fait pas. On ne permet même pas aux filles et aux garçons de se promener ensemble. Ça ne se passe pas comme ça. Une femme enceinte doit se couvrir, pour ne pas montrer qu'elle a couché avec son mari. À la télé, ma mère nous obligeait de fermer la télé si les gens s'embrassaient.

[...]

Au début de la séance suivante:

W. — Je pense à votre lapsus d'hier.

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C. T. — Quand j'ai dit « deux garçons s'embrassaient » ?

W. — Oui. Je pense que vous avez à examiner ce que votre inconscient faisait là ? (Sourire.) Je préfère que l'inconscient de l'analyste n'entre pas ici. Ce serait mieux si vous étiez neutre.

C. T. — On peut toujours faire des hypothèses quand on fait des lapsus...

Un mois plus tard:

[...]

W. — Je pense au lapsus que vous avez fait, deux garçons en train de s'embrasser. C'était une leçon de tolérance. On ne peut que faire des hypothèses sur les lapsus, vous avez dit.

Note: In this collaborative paper, the Introduction, Part One and the Conclusion are largely the work of Doron Almagor. Part Two is largely the work of Clive Thomson. We would like to thank the members of our cartel in Toronto, especially Dr Judy Hamilton, for their dialogue in writing these questions and propositions.

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This volume collects the papers presented at the third English language seminar of the Lacanian Field in Paris. The first volume was about *The Clinic of Transference*, and the second one on *The Ethics of the Psychoanalytic Treatment*. Both of them have been already published.

This seminar was held on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, June 28, 29 and 30, 2007, and was organised by the research group "Lacan in English". This group, chaired by Colette Soler, included in June 2007 Sol Aparicio, John Holland, Luis Izcovich, Colette Sepel and Radu Turcanu.

The seminar brought together psychoanalysts from various countries —Australia, England, Ireland, Israel, Slovenia, Canada, United States— who for six half-days, held discussions with English speaking colleagues from the School of Psychoanalysis of the Lacanian Field. These three days of lively meetings ended with a friendly reception attended by all participants.

We are printing the texts that were presented at the Seminar. We have not sought to use a single version of the English language for all the texts, therefore they are reproduced in the form chosen by the authors.

For reasons of confidentiality, Bruce Fink did not wish that his paper appear in this volume, since it was based on a clinical case.

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*For reasons of confidentiality,
Bruce Fink's intervention was not able
to appear in this volume.*