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**The Collapse of
the Function of the
Father and Its Effect
on Gender Roles**

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The year 1970 saw the publication of Germaine Greer's famous book *The Female Eunuch*. It was without doubt an intellectual landmark within what is called the second feminist wave.¹ In scope, both the book and the wave surpass feminist territory alone and aim at liberation as such, since they are directed against authoritarian political structures, the nuclear family, and power in general. Greer expresses this quite clearly in the last paragraph of her first chapter: "The anti-feminists have complained that the emancipation of women will imply the end of marriage, the end of morality, and the end of the state. . . . When we reap the harvest which the unwitting suffragettes sowed, we shall see that the anti-feminists were after all right."

Meanwhile, a quarter of a century has elapsed, we are ready to reap this harvest, and indeed Greer's prophetic words have turned out to be true. However, there is one snag: she herself does not seem to be very happy with the result. Quite the contrary. In an interview with the *Sunday Times Magazine*,² she tells us that if women were in charge, the United Kingdom would return to the status of a kind of Third World country. The rest of the interview follows the same lines.

Since this reversal is rather a surprise, one is tempted to look for reassuring *ad hominem* explanations: she is probably frustrated, it has something to do with her age, and so on. Strange as it may seem, we find an analogous although more subtle reversal in the work of another prominent figure of that movement, namely Doris Lessing. Anybody

who has read her *Martha Quest* tetralogy cannot doubt her literary talent or her left-wing feminist commitment. Nevertheless, in her recent autobiography and the ensuing interviews, she distances herself from the movement and even goes so far as to say that she deplors its impact on her personal life.³

The crowning touch came in 1990, when Camille Paglia stormed onto the scene with her *Sexual Personae*, which immediately turned her into a cult figure. Indeed, her message was loud and clear: being a woman and a confirmed lesbian, she wrote a polemic plea in favor of the male cause and described femininity in a way no man had dared to do since Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter*.⁴

I mention these three women in my introduction because they express quite clearly the contemporary malaise concerning such issues as gender, patriarchy, and feminism. In this respect, our century has seen a striking reversal. During the first fifty years, a popular interpretation of Freud turned the authoritarian father into the source of all evil, both at an individual and at a sociological level. Authority had to be banned; freedom was the word. The obvious success of this movement from the 1960s on gave rise to its exact opposite: nowadays, popular opinion is asking, sometimes even begging, for a return of law and order, that is, a return to the authoritarian father, again both at the individual and at the sociological level. No wonder Colette Soler defines our century as the one in which we wanted to educate fathers into their role.⁵ Of course, this proposition affects the way in which gender roles are viewed, or, more precisely, the difficulties with or even the decline of those roles. The two main characters in question are the father and femininity. The purpose of this essay is to show that Freud and Lacan present us with different answers.

Freud and the Primal Father

The father of psychoanalysis is without doubt the man who elevated the importance of fatherhood to a hitherto undreamt-of level. This was not new in itself; it had been done before, albeit within a religious context. What was new was the fact that a liberal, nonreligious Jew endorsed this traditional religious view from a scientific standpoint. The analogy with religion goes even further: followers who tried to privilege the position

of the mother were to be banned from the orthodox analytical church. There was no room for mothers and women.

Both in his case studies and in his theoretical work in general, Freud places the accent entirely on the real father. Nevertheless, there is a striking difference between real fathers in his clinical practice and the way in which he depicts the father role in his oedipal theory. In his classic case studies, we meet a father who is living on his wife's fortune, a second who travels in a state of total depression from one mental institution to another, a third who is utterly dominated by his wife, and a fourth who is ill but nevertheless is capable of offering his daughter in exchange for his mistress to the latter's husband.⁶ The fact that in his clinical studies these real fathers turn out time and again to be total failures does not prevent Freud from cultivating the idea of the oedipal father as a feared, menacing character whose threat of castration has to be taken seriously. In order to close the gap between clinical reality and his theory, Freud invented the myth of the primal father. The myth runs as follows: once upon a time, there must have been a real such father, an *Urvater*, and the phylogenetic memory of this father is stronger than any weak incarnation of it. Further, every real father, strong or weak, occupies this terrifying oedipal position owing to this collectively inherited myth.⁷ The result is the omnipresent Oedipus complex, which divides humans by gender into two binary categories: one that has the penis and is always in danger of losing it, and one that does not and develops envy of it. Again, we have to stress the fact that for Freud, both the father and the penis are taken as real, which means that Freudian gender differentiation belongs to what is usually referred to as "essentialism." It is the same essentialism that returns in Freud's perception of the failure of the analytic process, that is, the "biological bedrock" he is talking about in his *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*.⁸

For Freud, this biological and consequently real bedrock is backed up by his myth of the primal horde and its leader. Moreover, for him, this myth was not so much a myth as a historical reality. He developed two versions of the story, and a comparison between them is fascinating. In the version in *Totem and Taboo*, we have the primal father in total possession of all females; a conspiracy of sons kills him in order to make the women sexually available. The net result of the murder is rather surprising: they discover themselves to be brothers with a common sense of

guilt and install the incest prohibition, which then becomes the cornerstone of human society. From this point onward, the father figure fills the picture; he is the one that has to be obeyed, revered, and so on.⁹

This first version is not very convincing, even for a hard-core Freudian: there is no mention of castration, the mother figure is not mentioned at all, and the acute sense of guilt is surprisingly unaccounted for. The second version of the story, which is found in *Moses and Monotheism*, is much more elaborate. This time, Freud describes a number of stages. The first contains only the primal father and his women; there are no mothers, and language is absent. In the second stage, the primal father is murdered, which unexpectedly results in the establishment of matriarchy. The third one gave Freud a lot of trouble. As a transitional phase it contains a strange mixture of matriarchy, mother-goddesses, clans of brothers, and an emerging totemism. The fourth and last stage reintroduces the primal father-patriarch thanks to an intermediate figure: the son. In one way or another, the son installs the cult of the father, and thus patriarchal power.¹⁰

This is the process which Freud recognizes at the heart of every monotheistic religion, that is, in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each of them has its own son, Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad, and all three of them reinstall the father figure. Moses installed the one and only father against pagan polytheism, Jesus endorsed the father figure as independent from any motherly involvement, and Muhammad finished the job with Allah. Now, there is something strange about these stories; instead of the murder of a primal father, more often than not we find a son who has to sacrifice himself in order to (re)install this father figure. Indeed, if we take a closer look at Freud's second version, it becomes obvious that the son needs the father in order to defend himself against the threat and power that he fears from femininity. The primal oedipal anxiety is not directed toward the father; on the contrary, the father is needed as a defense against the mother.

From a Lacanian point of view, the second myth is read as the installation of the symbolic function, through which the subject will be protected from the *jouissance* of the first Other and directed toward the ever-shifting dialectics of desire. This is all the more obvious if one pays attention to Freud's casual remarks about language acquisition and its relationship to the inheritance of the sense of guilt. These remarks are to be found in the very same essay wherein he develops his second version.¹¹

In the second version, it becomes clear that the son is in need of the symbolic function of the father. Hence, the observation that all sons try to saddle their fathers with precisely this symbolic function becomes comprehensible. In this respect, Freud's myth is very reassuring for every neurotic: once upon a time, there was a real father who, and so on. This is the message he conveys to Hans, the little boy in one of his case studies.¹² Lacan stresses this need and renames it: the father is a symptom of the son.

The effects of what I would term the patriarchal-monotheistic complex come down to a binary installation of the gender roles. On the one hand, sons and potential fathers; on the other, daughters and potential mothers. In such a system, gender characteristics must be described in terms of opposites, strong-weak, clever-stupid, brave-cowardly, and so forth. At the same time, such a system tends to create a situation that produces these characteristics, so the whole thing becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. No wonder the daily prayer of the traditional Jewish man contains the following exclamation: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, that Thou hast not made me a woman."

Today, in spite of Freud's allegedly real myth, we are witnessing a very strange phenomenon: the massive collapse of the father figure. Historically, the function itself used to remain intact; only the embodiment changed ("The king is dead, long live the king"). Thus the belief in the unique system as such was kept intact, and the replacement of one figure by another did not affect the system or the gender roles. Nowadays, we are living in a period when the symbolic father as such is murdered, together with the belief in him. It is no coincidence that the prevailing attitude today is so-called postmodern cynicism, which epitomizes above all widespread distrust and lack of belief in any symbolic function whatever. From a Freudian point of view, this confronts us with the reversal of the primal myth, and thus with the loss of protection against *jouissance* and consequently a return to original chaos. The original myth installed binary gender differentiation; therefore, its reversal must have serious effects on this differentiation.

In order to understand these effects, first of all we have to understand the problems for which the father function used to be the solution. Following Freud, we know that the central problem for every hysterical subject is the *Spaltung*, that is, the fact that he or she is divided between a conscious and an unconscious, an ego and an id, a true and a false

self. This division emerges over and over again at exactly the same moment: whenever the subject is required to identify a solution to his or her own existence. These moments were discovered by Freud in their developmental stage, in other words, when children were confronted with them. They are threefold: first, sexual differences, especially female sexual identity; second, the role of the father, especially concerning the origin of the subject; and third, the sexual rapport between parents. This Freudian description was redefined in a structural way by Lacan: thus, the subject is always a divided subject $\$$, owing to a structural lack in the symbolic order. This division emerges at the same characteristic points: feminine identity, authority, and sexual rapport. This was summarized by Lacan in his formula $S(A)$ and evoked in his three provocative statements: the Woman does not exist, the Other of the Other does not exist, the sexual rapport does not exist. This is a structural problem: while the three of them *do* exist in the Real, they do not find an appropriate answer in the Symbolic. As a result, the subject has to fall back on solutions in the Imaginary.¹³

The classical solution for the hysterical subject had already been discovered by Freud, although we need Lacan's reinterpretation. This is of course the Oedipus complex. From a Lacanian point of view, the oedipal solution consists in setting up an Other, who guarantees a certain feminine identity and thus allows the possibility of a sexual rapport. The recurrent problem for the hysterical subject is that this Other who guarantees can never do so enough: the series starts with the father, but it does not take long for the subject to realize that every father fails; at that point, the endless chain of big Others is started. Usually, the oedipal series is carried over into religion or ideology, where the hysterical subject continues to look for an undivided big Other who will function as a guarantee. Hence, from a structural point of view, the hysterical subject is essentially a *believer*. He or she needs an Other to believe in, in order to put an end to doubting. Paradoxically, this belief is concealed behind a more eye-catching characteristic, namely the hysterical subject's aptitude for questioning and undermining authority, that is, someone else's authority. Being the quintessential zealot, the hysterical subject will always fight another religion or ideology in the name of his or her own "true faith." This fight will be all the more violent if it takes place between similar and thus competing beliefs. Just think of the scene

in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (Terry Jones, 1979), in which a member of the Jewish Freedom Fighters cries out "The enemy!," whereupon his companion asks "The Romans?," to which the indignant response is, "No, the Jewish Liberation Front." In this sense, the hysteric is not so much a revolutionary as the essential supporter of authority, albeit from time to time a so-called alternative authority. This relationship can be understood in a structural sense using Lacan's discourse theory, in which the discourse of the Master and the discourse of the hysteric are in perfect balance. From a clinical point of view, the main problem for the hysteric is that those who incarnate authority are never fully up to the mark, hence the typical dissatisfaction of the hysteric and his or her ever-shifting desire.

Thus, the hysterical divided subject is looking for an ironclad guarantee from the Other without a lack, who knows for certain. This is the basis of normal group formation, as described by Freud in his *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego*. The leader takes the place of the external object, with whom the members of the group-to-be identify; more precisely, the identification focuses on the ego ideal, which blots out the individual egos.¹⁴ This is why subjects who were originally very different start resembling each other. This often finds expression in similar clothing and in the development of a common jargon. They have become what Lacan describes with a pun as *des égos/égaux*, that is, a group of identical followers. Normally—that is, according to the norm, and thus oedipally—this position of the leader is the original oedipal paternal position and embodies a very necessary function. To put it succinctly: it gives the subject the opportunity to come to terms with his or her own desire and *jouissance*, usually by elaborating and eventually throwing away the terms of the father and choosing his or her own. This used to be the normal evolution of what I would like to call developmental hysteria, starting with the belief in the almighty father in childhood, provoking and destroying him during puberty and adolescence, and coming to terms with him in adulthood. Thus, the differentiation made by Lacan between the real father, the imaginary father figure, and the symbolic function of the father is a very useful one.

However, this normal evolution is no longer the case. This brings us to what is probably the biggest problem today, and not only for the hysterical subject: namely the fact that the symbolic father function itself has

become questionable. Its guaranteeing and answer-providing function is not very convincing any more, to say the least. As a result, the number of hysterical subjects who are on the run, looking for a new master, is on the increase. Moreover, since it is the function itself which is affected, the possibility of coming to terms with it is seriously hampered, because one is forced to stick with the real father and is without the symbolic father function. This situation is very aptly described by Slavoj Žižek in terms of a reversal of the original Freudian primal myth.¹⁵

Normally, it should be the real primal father who is done away with, with the result that the symbolic paternal function can be established; the sons can then identify with the latter in order to take up their position as men. In the reversed version, instead of the real primal father, it is the symbolic function which is destroyed, thereby setting loose what Žižek calls the primal anal father, a figure who is only on the lookout for his own *jouissance*. Owing to the collapse of the symbolic paternal function, it is this primal anal father that the hysteric will meet during his or her search, especially in his paranoid version (besides the perverse one). There are abundant contemporary examples, from the return of fundamentalism on a mass scale to the success of smaller sects. The two share a number of typical characteristics, among them the installation of an absolute big Other with an irrevocable authority. This big Other is the incarnation of an absolute, albeit obscure, truth, which always concerns ethics, that is, desire and *jouissance*, and enforces a sexual rapport, in which women are assigned a submissive position.

From a structural point of view, this reversal of the primal myth explains several typical contemporary phenomena on the gender level. Contemporary sons have great difficulties in regarding their fathers as representatives of ancient patriarchal authority. As a consequence, the security and protection associated with that authority has disappeared, resulting in ever-increasing levels of anxiety and thus aggression in the sons. The absence of the possibility of identifying with the symbolic function itself condemns the contemporary male to staying at the level of the immature boy and son, afraid of the threatening female figure, which once more assumes its atavistic characteristics. These sons are just wandering around, staying forever in the same position, owing to the lack of an identificatory figure; thirty-year-old kids and adolescents of forty are no longer the exception. On the psychopathological level,

we are confronted with a new category: the so-called borderline state. From our point of view, this is the hysterical subject stuck at the preoedipal, anxiety-loaded level. For lack of a masculine identificatory figure, a number of men proceed in the opposite direction and become perfect . . . mothers. Recent developments in this respect can literally be seen on the screen. In *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Rober Benton, 1979), it sufficed for the hero to take the motherly role, but later, *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Chris Columbus, 1994) required a complete metamorphosis of a man into a woman.

On the feminine side, we also find a drastic change. The disappearance of the old-style masculine superiority implies at the same time a disappearance of feminine inferiority. This is demonstrated by university enrollment lists and soft-porn movies: in both, women take the upper position. The absence of the security-enhancing symbolic law regulating desire and enjoyment invests woman with all the ancient masculine fears, which results in a turnaround: today, we have woman-the-hunter and man-the-hunted. Thus, the daughters are turned into hunter-gatherers for whom every male is free game, and indeed, the men are fleeing.

At the root of the myth, we meet the real *Urvater*. The loss of classical patriarchal authority forces the sons to look for alternatives. Hence, primal fathers are popping up everywhere, on the lookout for their own *jouissance* and attracting anxious sons who are hoping for protection. Moreover, the collapse of the symbolic father function is not without an effect on the symbolic order as such: ever-increasing analphabetism is mirrored by the introduction of pictograms on a worldwide scale.

What of the mothers? As a category, they are more and more marginalized, condemned to stay behind with the children, among whom, more often than not, they count their partner of the moment. While their sons trouble them the most, there is a new coalition in the making with their daughters.

Thus, these shifts in gender roles form part of a wider confusion, in which anxiety is predominant. The predictable Freudian remedy is perfectly illustrated by Freud's interventions in his case study on Little Hans: Freud will try to reinstall the real father. From a historical point of view, this is very ironic, because this solution inevitably leads to phallocratic fascism. It reminds one of the famous scene in *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) in which the depiction of decadence is exemplified by the

moment when a pure boy in SS uniform stands up in the audience and starts to sing, announcing the new order. The imaginary fathers of fascism are nothing but attempts to bridle femininity and *jouissance*. It is no coincidence that the great masters of totalitarian regimes could only tolerate child-women as partners. The biographies of Hitler and Mao are quite clear on this point, and they find a contemporary reflection in ever-increasing pedophilia. This is a clear indication of the anxiety of men when they are confronted with women as sexually active, desiring, and enjoying subjects.

The effect of this classical solution is a neat distribution of gender roles: the male warrior and son, the pure maiden, the childbearing mother, and the omnipresent primal father. This was studied and described in detail by Klaus Theweleit in his classic, *Male Fantasies*.¹⁶ This book charts the rise of fascism by concentrating on "trivial" material: publicity, posters, literary productions, pamphlets, and so forth. In this material, the distribution of gender roles is very clear. Men are represented as the defenders of law and order, fighting for their country; women are incarnated pureness, fair virgins, passively waiting for their one and only task: the production of new sons. Nevertheless, woman's dangerous alter ego appears in the background: the devouring vamp, origin of a dangerous enjoyment in which every man risks annihilation and against which he has to defend himself by establishing an ever more intimate brotherhood. The very fact that Theweleit undertook this study in order to come to terms with a fascist father turns the book into a psychoanalytic cure, which goes further than Freud himself. As we already have shown, Freud stuck to the father, and thus to the classical solution.

The Freudian solution is exemplified by the relationship between Sigmund Freud as the hysterical subject and Wilhelm Fliess as the paranoid master.¹⁷ From a structural point of view, the relationship between the hysterical and the paranoid subject is a perfect match: the divided hysteric is looking for a guaranteeing big Other without a lack, who knows for certain; the paranoid subject is looking for followers and believers. Indeed, the paranoid subject is not divided at all and shows no lack whatever: he knows. Owing to his psychotic structure, he has never accepted the oedipal answers. This is why Freud described the paranoid as the quintessential unbeliever. His refusal of the oedipal structure, which Lacan terms the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, forces him at a

given stage of psychotic development to produce answers of his own. These answers concern the same questions as the hysteric's—feminine sexual identity, the guaranteeing role of the father, and sexual rapport—but they will be treated in a totally different way. Whereas the hysterical subject is always in doubt, never sure about the choices he or she has made, by contrast, the paranoid subject knows for certain and transforms this knowledge into a system. From a psychiatric point of view, this typically gives rise to delusion, megalomania, lack of doubt, lack of self-reflection, and complete certainty. The message is clear: he is a master without any lack whatever. The basic fault or lack will always and irrevocably be ascribed to the other, while the paranoiac is incarnated innocence. He is not only innocent, he is convinced of the malevolence of the other who accuses him and persecutes him. Colette Soler has termed this the typical *innocence paranoïaque*.¹⁸

Thus, the problem of the all-knowing paranoid master is completely different from the one faced by the forever doubting hysterical subject. So long as he is the *only one* who knows, his status as all-knowing is rather precarious. Freud saw this clearly in his study on Schreber, when he asked himself what the difference was between him and Schreber. This question was especially pertinent in view of the fact that some of his contemporaries were accusing Freud of producing delusional theories. Freud's answer to this question runs as follows: Schreber's theory is only believed in by one person (i.e., Schreber), while mine is at least believed in by a group of people who are ready to try it out in practice. Hence the typical problem of the paranoid subject: as long as he is the only one who is convinced of his knowledge, his status as master is rather precarious, and he is in dire need of convincing others. A historical example is again provided by Schreber; he wrote his memoirs in order to convince the world of the correctness of his *Weltanschauung*.¹⁹ This explains why a considerable number of paranoid subjects start writing or lecturing. It is the psychotic's attempt at installing a social bond, exactly the thing that he lacks. It is lacking because every social bond is heir to the oedipal structure, and this has been rejected by the paranoiac. As a result, the psychotic stands outside normal social relationships. In psychiatric terms, the psychotic is the quintessentially different other, even the uncanny other. For Lacan, the psychotic stands outside the four discourses and therefore outside the social relationships; and for Freud, psychosis

is a narcissistic neurosis, that is, a neurosis without the normal object relations. The paradoxical result of this situation is that it is the paranoid who is most in need of an audience such as a group, in order to "keep his sanity," that is, to avoid a psychotic breakdown. The group functions as a "suppletion," the typically psychotic complement to this lack.

Lacan and "The Other of the Other Does Not Exist"

The Freudian solution is a very conservative one, because it tries to reinstate the father figure with the resultant classical gender roles. This reinstatement is particularly important for the hysterical subject in general and for men in particular, since it provides them with security. Nevertheless, such a reinstatement is virtually impossible nowadays, because its very basis, the symbolic father function, has been destroyed. Hence, Freud's solution can create only primal fathers with a primal horde of their own. Apart from this ever-failing solution, there should be other possibilities. What has Lacan to say in these matters?

If one studies Lacan in this respect, it becomes clear that his last theory differs radically from his first conceptualizations. Specifically in matters of oedipal theory, his famous "return to Freud" turns into a new theory. Indeed, Lacan's subsequent elaborations of the Freudian oedipal complex characterize his entire development.

Initially, he follows Freud, albeit with a Hegelian *Aufhebung* (sublation), when he interprets the Freudian oedipal complex as the paternal metaphor. Indeed, with this very idea of metaphor, he distances himself from the idea of the real father and stresses the *function* beyond the actual father figure; the metaphor installs an organizational principle through which the transition from duality to triangularity is inaugurated, that is, the desire of the mother is answered by the Name-of-the-Father. The main goal is the separation of the child from the mother.²⁰ It is important to note that in this early Lacanian theory, the emphasis is placed on the level of desire, which corresponds to a singular lack. The distance from Freud's real father becomes even clearer in Lacan's seminar "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis," where the Name-of-the-Father is explicitly described as a sublimation ("To introduce as primordial the function of the father is a sublimation"), together with a question that

had already been asked by Freud: what is the basis of patriarchal authority?²¹

The turning point comes in 1963, with the seminar "Les noms du père," a seminar that with the exception of its first lesson was never given, as a result of Lacan's expulsion from the International Psychoanalytic Association.²² This historical context, combined with the fact that for years after Lacan keeps alluding to this phantom seminar without actually delivering it, presents us with a magnificent illustration of its subject: the not-existing seminar functions as a structuring lack. The very fact that Lacan has made the transition from the singular to the plural (from "le Nom-du-Père" to "les noms du père") accentuates the lack and breaks through the at-least-one [*au moins un*] aspect of the Name-of-the-Father. In this respect, the new formula is very significant: "the Other of the Other does not exist."

In 1969, with the seminar "L'Envers de la psychanalyse," Lacan breaks radically with Freudian oedipal theory. The second part of it is titled "Beyond the Oedipus Complex."²³ Freudian oedipal theory is described as Freud's dream, his answer to the desire of the hysteric: the installation of an idealized father figure, who produces knowledge on the level of truth in matters of desire, *jouissance*, and gender. It is the same character that makes its appearance in the hysterical transference neurosis: the subject supposed to know. Coming to terms with this subject implies coming to terms with (the Name-of-)the father and is an essential goal of Lacanian analysis. For Freud, its installation was something like the end in itself, albeit a never-ending one.

It is this end which was to preoccupy Lacan for the rest of his career. In the seminar "R.S.I.," he considers the number of names of the father to be "indefinite," and he stresses their function, that is, to keep the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary distinct from each other. The operative principle in this function is the act of naming.²⁴ A Name-of-the-Father functions as the fourth knot which binds the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary in such a way that they remain distinct. Hence, we reencounter the function of separation. It is this function which is focused upon in Lacan's theory on the end of an analysis.

To summarize, we can say that the Lacanian subject is constituted in an ever-alienating relationship with a first Other, from which it is separated by the intervention of a second Other. The advantage of our for-

mulation is that it is neither developmental nor gender related. The idea of separation is central and takes place through name giving; the real father is superfluous in this function.

This idea is endorsed in historical anthropology, where one finds separation and separation rules long before the concept of fatherhood arises. Within the maternal clan structure, separation was originally based on food taboos; sexual taboos are much more recent. Based upon these rules and the accompanying name giving, separate clan groups were established among which exchange was possible. The initially maternal clan gave way to the matrilineal family, which in turn changed into patriarchy. The further development is such that the separation function coincides with the function of the father and is directed against the union between mother and child, especially against the union between mother and son. Each individual father is invested with both the function and the accompanying authority within the larger framework of patriarchy and monotheism whose representative he has become. Compared with the clan structure, the kinship system formally remains the same: at a given age, a child is segregated from one group and introduced into another, an event which is endorsed by name giving. Contemporaneously with the evolution from clan structure to patriarchy, there is another shift in accent, that is, from food to sex.²⁵

During the ensuing evolution, kinship groups tend to become smaller and smaller, diminishing from the enlarged patriarchal family to the nuclear family of our century. In turn, the individual as such comes to the fore. Today the function of separation has reached its zenith with omnipresent egocratia: the subject is separated from one Other, but the step toward a second Other is not very convincing.

In the light of this historical evolution, and combined with a clinical point of view, the Freudian oedipal father and even the Lacanian Name-of-the-Father come down to a hypothesis which is especially apparent in the symptoms of the neurotic. The father as a symptom on the level of the individual is mirrored by a collective symptom on the level of society—that is, the individual belief in the father is based on a collective belief. This hypothesis of the neurotic is based on the idea of an exception, a founding figure, the *x non phi de x*, the *au moins un*, which is the Lacanian counterpart of Freud's primal father. Even Freud was aware of the fallacy in his reasoning. Indeed, when he tried to explain mono-

theism and the Oedipus complex through the function of the father, he had to ask himself what the basis was of this base. In order to find an answer, he had to fall back on an expression used by a church father: *Credo quia absurdum* (Tertullian).²⁶ But Lacan goes much further than this when he states that “the Other of the Other does not exist.” There is no guarantee-providing exception; the father and the Oedipus complex come down to creationist sublimation, which enables the subject to come to terms with the other lacking signifiers, that is, femininity and *jouissance*.²⁷

This Lacanian reinterpretation of the Oedipus complex—where the sexual identity is decided—leaves Freudian essentialism behind and opens new perspectives in matters of gender identity. Since the subject is always characterized by a structural lack of being [*manque-à-être*], it has to find its identity in the Other. This brings us to the very opposite of essentialism and creates the impression that Lacan belongs to constructivism, where gender identity is a mere effect of the joint venture between the Symbolic and the Imaginary, that is, the Other.

This Other is the contemporaneous union of signifiers which predominates within a certain grouping and functions as a guarantee because the individual members of that grouping believe in this Other. In this respect, gender identity is an arbitrary convention, and there is the possibility of choice for every subject; however, the choice has already been made for him or her by the group, the community to which he or she belongs, resulting in a series of conventions; each subject has to acquire in his or her own way the conventions of the group; changes are possible, but they take place within a temporal evolution.²⁸

If we compare Freud’s mythical construction of a primal father to Lacan’s structural theory, it is quite clear that this shift from the real father to the function of naming frees us from the paranoid-fascist solution with its ever-present incarnation of the primal father. The constructivist part of Lacanian theory permits us to understand the difference between present gender identifications and those of the past. The collective convention based upon a common belief as a symptom used to be far greater in Freud’s time. Nowadays, this collective experience is fragmented into much smaller “peer groups,” each with a convention of its own. The difference between then and now can be understood perfectly in terms of the difference between monotheism and polytheism.

The belief in the one and almighty created a far larger community with a much stronger impact on its members, hence their idea of being essentially right. Polytheism, on the other hand, necessarily results in diversity, with an accompanying element of wider choice at the level of the individual. In this respect, the typical Freudian idea that monotheism is a further step in human evolution is rather doubtful. Karen Armstrong's study *A History of God* clearly demonstrates that monotheism inevitably leads to cruel holy wars in the name of the one and only truth, banning and killing all others — *Gott mit uns!*²⁹ Fundamentalism and fascism are therefore one and the same, and it is no coincidence that women are always regarded as inferior in these monotheistic groups. Polytheism, on the other hand, has to be tolerant, in line with its starting point, and, not surprisingly, this tolerance is not without an effect on the position of women.

As we have already said, this leaves us with the impression of Lacan as a constructivist, considering gender as a mere construct, to be changed virtually at will, although it takes some time. This was one of the major beliefs of the post-May 1968 generation, framed within the larger belief of the constructibility of man in general and the accompanying demand for equality. In the meantime, both have been proved wrong.

At this point, we have to commence another reading of Lacan: contemporary with the shift in the theory on the Name-of-the-Father/names of the father described above, Lacan turns his attention from desire to *jouissance* and from castration to the structurally determined loss of *objet a*, meaning that the category of the real comes to the fore. The effect is that Lacan moves beyond the original debate between constructivism and essentialism. Indeed, originally the real of the drive insists in a non-gender-specified way; the opposition does not reside in female versus male, but in the real versus the symbolico-imaginary; it is this ever-insisting gap, caused by a double lack, that will determine the constitution of the subject.

This new theory was elaborated in Seminar 11, where Lacan starts his discussion of the causation of the subject with something which is already familiar to his audience: the proposition that the drive revolves around a lack. However, at this point, he surprises his audience by stating that there is not one but two lacks. The first is the lack in the chain of signifiers. This is the typically hysterical and thus Freudian level,

where desire can never be fully represented and expressed, let alone satisfied. In Lacanian terms, this means that the subject, confronted with the enigma of the desire of the Other, tries to verbalize this desire and thus constitutes itself by identifying with the signifiers in the field of the Other, without ever succeeding in filling the gap between subject and Other. This process of alienation results in the advent of the subject [*l'avènement du sujet*].³⁰

However, this lack is only a retake of another lack, which Lacan terms anterior and real in comparison to the one described above. It has to be understood in the context of the advent of living being [*l'avènement du vivant*], that is, the emergence of sexual reproduction in phylogenesis, which is repeated with every ontogenesis. This anterior lack concerns the price life has to pay for the acquisition of sexual reproduction. From the moment an organism becomes capable of reproducing itself in a sexual way, it loses its individual immortality, and death becomes an unavoidable necessity. The individual loses something at birth that will be represented later on by all the other substitute objects. Lacan depicts this primary loss with his myth of the lamella, the object that flies away at birth, and suggests that this is nothing but pure life instinct, beyond gender as such.³¹

Lacan's new conceptualization can therefore be summarized as follows: the real of the drive is not a gender-specific insistence, and it cannot be constructed from a male-female opposition. Rather, it consists in an opposition between the real on the one hand and the combined symbolic and imaginary on the other, each one with a lack of their own. It is this double lack that determines the ever-insistent gap between the real and the symbolico-imaginary, and thus the constitution of the subject.

This theory confronts us with a more essential "essentialism" than the Freudian. It sets a task for every culture, that of providing a more or less collective solution for this typically human condition. The attempts to answer this double lack give rise to the differentiation between two different positions of the subject and especially to the relationship between them. Normally—that is, according to the collectively endorsed norm—we expect a male and a female position; following Lacan, these are nothing more than attempts to symbolize the lost core of our being. Owing to the structural character of the primary lack, these solutions will never be satisfactory, nor will they ever be resolved. They

belong to the category of *ce qui ne cesse pas de ne pas s'écrire* [what does not stop not being written].

One of the basic characteristics of the Freudian drives is their conservatism: they wish to return to a previous state, to repair the original loss. It is this theory that Lacan develops further with his theory of the double lack. The annihilation of the lack is operated through the installation of a certain relationship between subject and Other, in which one is used to fill the lack of the Other. If this process takes place in a non-mediated, dual way, the result is that the subject is totally usurped and reabsorbed, without any chance of escape. This is the level of *jouissance* that can be found in a particular relationship between mother and child, usually resulting in child psychosis. If this process takes place in a mediated, triangular way, then the subject will be used in a limited way, just as it uses the other subject. This is the level of desire and phallic *jouissance*.³²

Hence, the relationship between two subjects, in which one functions as an object for the other, is not in the first place a relationship between two subjects with different genders; in the primal relationship, there is not even any gender differentiation involved as such. The basic relationship is one between *active and passive*, and the main question is: who takes whom as an object?

This brings us to a major Freudian theme—one that has been largely neglected.³³ Time and again, in his quest for the definition of gender identity, Freud arrives at the active-passive opposition, and time and again, he has to admit that the male-female differentiation cannot be reduced to this opposition. Nevertheless, from his patriarchal point of view, femininity comes down to passivity. His obstinacy in this respect becomes all the more apparent when he discusses the failure of (Freudian) analysis to go beyond a certain point. Indeed, in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, his essentialism brings him to the conclusion that no analysis can go beyond the biological rock of castration. He considers this a biological and thus a general principle, which can be understood in terms of “repudiation of femininity” and which applies to both sexes. Nevertheless, the elaboration in this very text makes it obvious that femininity is not to be equated with castration, but, again, stands for passivity.³⁴ The passive position is the most dreaded, for every subject, whichever its gender. Another thing made obvious by this text is

Freud's patriarchal stance and his ensuing adherence to the father position, although he is dimly aware that the very process of analysis opens up the possibility of something beyond this position. What he fails to see is that his patriarchal stance has two adverse consequences: his insistent failure in the analytic transference process and his simplistic reduction of femininity to passivity.

This brings us to our conclusion, where the present fin de siècle and the end of analysis can be compared in matters of gender and patriarchy.

Freudian analysis ends in a paradoxical way, since it tends to endorse patriarchy and the traditional gender roles. The individual symptoms must be replaced by the collective ones, thus replacing idiosyncratic "hysterical misery" by "common unhappiness."³⁵ For Lacan, analysis ends with a very particular identification of the subject with his or her symptom. This particularity resides in the fact that this identification is an identification not with (the desire of) the Other, but with an aspect of the real. Gender identity—that is, the way in which a subject comes to terms with the drive—contains two quite different parts: the real of the drive, and the part dependent upon the Other. Previously, the subject had identified with/alienated itself from the desire of the Other based on his or her belief in this Other, with a consequent typical gender position. The discovery made by the analysand during the analysis that this Other is just a symptom, a homemade construction that does not exist, discloses at the same time the symptomatic character of the subject itself and its entailing nonexistence. This paves the way to the real being of the subject, *son être du sujet*. From that point onward, the subject can no longer be considered a mere "answer to or from the Other" [*réponse de l'Autre*]; on the contrary, the subject is now an "answer to or from the real" [*réponse du réel*].³⁶

Here we can invoke Lacan's reasoning on creation. Indeed, in my opinion, the "identification with the real of the symptom" has to be understood via the idea of creation. The essential argument can be recognized in Lacan's earlier ideas on sublimation and *creatio ex nihilo* in his seminar "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis." The subject can "choose" to elevate nothing to something and to enjoy this: "The object is elevated to the dignity of the Thing."³⁷ Applied to the end of analysis, this means that the subject has actively created his or her own symptom in the real and proceeds by identifying with it. In this way, the symptom takes the

place of the ever-lacking object. Finally, it takes the place of the lacking sexual rapport and furnishes a self-made answer to it, instead of the previous Other-made ones. Lacan accentuates this shift by introducing a neologism. The subject has to become a *sinthome*, a combination of symptom [*symptôme*], holy man [*saint homme*], and Saint Thomas (the one who did not believe the Other and went for the Real Thing): "On the level of the *sinthome* . . . there is relationship. There is only relationship where there is *sinthome*."³⁸

Contemporary society has also discovered the nonexistence of the Other. There are inevitable consequences in matters of gender and law. In an earlier age, there were collectively accepted and endorsed rules within the patriarchal-monotheistic complex which governed the distribution of *jouissance* (food, sex) in a binary way (male-female). Today, these collective rules have lost their authority and are more and more open to question. Typical reactions are a generalized feeling of meaninglessness and depression (i.e., mourning for the death of the Other) or a postmodern cynical position (anything goes). More creatively, the former collective rules tend to be replaced by strictly individually determined arrangements—"rules" is a too strong word—between two particular individuals. This is of course the "mutual consent" or "informed consent" of our time, between partners who are supposed to be equals. A number of these relationships will reinstall the same alienating subject-Other relationship, albeit on a smaller scale; a smaller number will go beyond this repetition and join the Lacanian *sinthome*. Owing to the particularity of this *sinthome*, predictions and generalizations are impossible.

It is crucial to stress this symptomatic part: there is no solution as such, and we remain in the realm of what does not stop not being written. The major change in comparison with the patriarchal-monotheist complex is the change in the binary opposition. Instead of male versus female, the present terms are *active* versus *passive*—so much for equality! At the level of contemporary society, this is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the two major themes in clinical sexology are sexual abuse or trauma and pedophilia. These two themes, important as they may be, tend to divert our attention from the underlying structure, which is not interpersonal. The interpersonal realm is none other than the expression of the *internal* antinomy: each subject has either to cope

actively with the real of his or her own drive or to undergo it in a *passive* way.

This seems to me the major theme of a new theory on gender.

Notes

- 1 Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London, 1970).
- 2 *Sunday Times Magazine*, 3 Mar. 1996.
- 3 Doris Lessing, *Children of Violence*, book 1: *Martha Quest*; book 2: *A Proper Marriage*; book 3: *A Ripple from the Storm* (London: Panther Books, 1966); *Children of Violence*, book 4: *Landlocked* (London: Panther Books, 1967); *Under My Skin* (London: Harper and Collins, 1994).
- 4 Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage, 1990); Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter: eine prinzipielle Untersuchung* (Wien: Braumüller, 1905). Weininger is described thus by Freud: "Weininger (the young philosopher who, highly gifted but sexually deranged, committed suicide after producing his remarkable book, *Geschlecht und Charakter* [1903]), in a chapter that attracted much attention, treated Jews and women with equal hostility and overwhelmed them with the same insults." Sigmund Freud, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*, in *The Standard Edition*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 10 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 36 n.1. Further citations will be to SE, followed by volume and page number.
- 5 Colette Soler, "Abord du nom-du-père," *Quarto: Bulletin de l'École de la Cause Freudienne en Belgique* 8 (1982): 58.
- 6 Respectively, the fathers of the Rat Man, the Wolf Man, Little Hans, and Dora.
- 7 This is elaborated by Freud in his case study on the Wolf Man, where the gap between the real father and the dreamt-of oedipal father is very large indeed. This case study can be considered his last attempt to find a basis in the Real for neurotic symptoms. Twenty years after his search for real seductions, Freud was looking with the same tenacity for a primal scene which had really been observed, even if only with dogs. The most remarkable thing about this polemical search, directed against Jung, is that Freud, when he had the answer in hand and was ready to vouch for the authenticity of a scene which really happened, chose this very moment to bring us a new answer: the primary fantasy (Sigmund Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, SE 17: 57-60). Primary fantasies are supposed to replace a missing reality: the child who has never seen a primal scene will imagine one. Therefore, these primal scenes appeal to a prehistoric, phylogenetic reality: seduction, primal scene, and castration were once, in the childhood period of humanity, a reality that was all too real. As such, they belong to the phylogenetic heritage of every human child (Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, SE 15-16: 371). In Freud's opinion, their importance is very great: in a number of cases, individual reality is changed under just the influence of this phylogenetic heritage. Thus, the Wolf Man saw his father as the castra-

tion authority, in accordance with the phylogenetic scheme and contrary to his own experience in which the threat of castration came exclusively from women (Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, SE 17:119). It is quite clear that, in doing this, Freud subordinated an individual reality to a relationship operating structurally between the real and the symbolic.

- 8 Freud complained that when one is trying to persuade a woman to abandon her wish for a penis on the grounds that it is unrealizable, or when one is seeking to convince a man that a passive attitude to men does not always signify castration, one gets the impression of hitting a biological bedrock. See Sigmund Freud, *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, SE 23:250-52.
- 9 In 1908, Freud wrote an introduction to Otto Rank's *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden*. Written originally within this significant context, it was published separately as *Family Romances* (SE 9). In my opinion, this small paper was the precursor of as well as the transition to the theory that he elaborated in 1912 in *Totem and Taboo*. From a certain point of view, it provides us with the hidden meaning of his essay on the primal father. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, SE 13:140-43.
- 10 The central subject of the book on Moses is the rewriting of the myth of the primal father. Freud tries it twice, without ever reaching an end. See Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23:80-84, 130-32. There is another important difference from *Totem and Taboo*. When Freud had finished the third essay in 1912, he considered it the best he had ever written, and he always maintained this opinion. *Moses and Monotheism*, and especially the third essay, was depicted by him as the worst thing he had ever written. This is a strange reversal, which cannot be considered in isolation from its counterpart, all the more because it is a reworking of this counterpart.
- 11 Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23:80, 82, 132.
- 12 The case study itself was conducted by the father of the little patient, and during the whole "treatment," Freud intervened only once in person: "Long before he (i.e. Hans) was in the world, I had known that a Little Hans would come who would be so fond of his mother that he would be bound to feel afraid of his father because of it; and I had told his father this." See Freud, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*, SE 10:42. This intervention is not an interpretation, it is a suggestive construction of something missing. **What Freud is introducing here is nothing but the missing part of the paternal metaphor.** The beauty of the case is that he introduced it not only for the little boy, but also for his father: "and I had told his father this." Which, in view of the parental situation, was highly necessary.
- 13 The content of this paragraph is a main theme of a much larger study. See Paul Verhaeghe, *Does the Woman Exist? From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine* (London: Rebus Press, 1997).
- 14 Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, SE 17:111-16.
- 15 Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), 205.
- 16 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); *Male Fantasies 2: Male*

- Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Chris Turner et al. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).
- 17 Freud's poem in his letter to Fliess of 29 Dec. 1899 speaks for itself: "Hail, To the valiant son who at the behest of his father appeared at the right time, / To be his assistant and fellow worker in fathoming the divine order. / But hail to the father, too, who just prior to the event found in his calculations / The key to restraining the power of the female sex / And to shouldering his burden of lawful succession; / No longer relying on sensory appearances, as does the mother, / He calls upon the higher powers to claim his right, conclusion, belief and doubt; / Thus, at the beginning, there stands, hale and hearty, equal to the exigency of error, the father / In his infinitely mature development. / May the calculation be correct and, as the legacy of labor, be transferred from father to son and beyond the parting of the centuries / Unite in the mind what the vicissitudes of life tear apart."
 - 18 Colette Soler, "Innocence paranoïaque et indignité mélancholique," in *Quarto: Bulletin de L'École de la Cause Freudienne en Belgique* 33-34 (1995): 23-24.
 - 19 Daniel Paul Schreber, *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken* (Leipzig, 1903). Sigmund Freud, *Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*, SE 12:9-84.
 - 20 The main references for this period are Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, book 3: *Psychoses (1955-56)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993) and "On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 179-225.
 - 21 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (1959-1960)*, book 7, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Denis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 143. Trans. modified.
 - 22 Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France*, vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 328-68.
 - 23 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, book 17: *L'envers de la psychanalyse (1969-70)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 99-166.
 - 24 Jacques Lacan, "R.S.I." (unpublished seminar), 11 Mar. 1975 and 15 Apr. 1975.
 - 25 For this historical evolution, see Evelyn Reed, *Woman's Evolution: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family* (New York: Pathfinder, 1975), and Christopher Knight, *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
 - 26 Freud, SE 23:118.
 - 27 See Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, book 7.
 - 28 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale (1906-1911)* (Paris: Payot, 1972), 104ff.
 - 29 Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (London: Mandarin, 1993), 51-94.
 - 30 See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1977), 197-205. I have elaborated this elsewhere; see Paul Verhaeghe, "Causation and Destitution of a Pre-Ontological Non-Entity: On the Lacanian Sub-

- ject," in *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, ed. Dany Nobus (London: Rebus Press, 1998), 164–89.
- 31 Of course, this reopens the debate on the drive theory, especially on the opposition between death and live drives. I have elaborated this in the third essay of "Love in Times of Solitude," in *Love in a Time of Loneliness: Three Essays on Drive and Desire* (New York: Other Press, 1999).
- 32 Both levels are described by Lacan in his discourse theory, each with a typical disjunction: impossibility for the level of desire, impotence for the level of *jouissance*.
- 33 In Freud's earliest conceptualisations, active-passive stood for masculine-feminine, with "passivity" as the most difficult component. Indeed, Freud meant it to represent femininity on the psychological level, but in the final analysis, it only demonstrated the lack of a specific signifier for the woman (Sigmund Freud, "Extracts from the Fliess Papers, Draft K," *SE* 1:228; "Draft M," *SE* 1:251; and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, *SE* 7:160, 219–20). In Freud's later work, there is an important shift: passivity also denotes a certain enjoyment in the mother and child relationship. The attempts of the child to make the transition to the pole of activity must be understood as a running away from the position of passive object of enjoyment to an active form of pleasure (Sigmund Freud, *Female Sexuality*, *SE* 21:235–36).
- 34 Sigmund Freud, *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, *SE* 23:250–53.
- 35 This is what Freud tells us in the very last paragraph of his *Studies on Hysteria*, *SE* 2:305.
- 36 Jacques Lacan, "L'étourdit," *Scilicet* 4 (1973): 15.
- 37 Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, book 7, 112.
- 38 Jacques Lacan, "Le Séminaire XXIII, Le sinthome (1975–76)," ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, in *Ornicar?* 8 (1976): 20 (my translation).