

‘Why’ is a Crooked Letter, So Don’t Even Ask the Question; Swipe Right Instead

Nicole Thomas

“The subject’s division is without doubt nothing other than the radical ambiguity that attaches itself to the very term, ‘truth.’”¹

Let us say that we are now more and more involved with a media avatar that lives a certain type of life for us. Sometimes we may not function as working beings without this technology and our place in relation to it. We communicate further and faster via this avatar; this avatar is wholly Imaginary, in the sense that Jacques Lacan uses this as an unconscious and self-propagated identification of and for the ego. This imaginary ego, however, is a necessary function of and for the human unconscious with or without technology.²

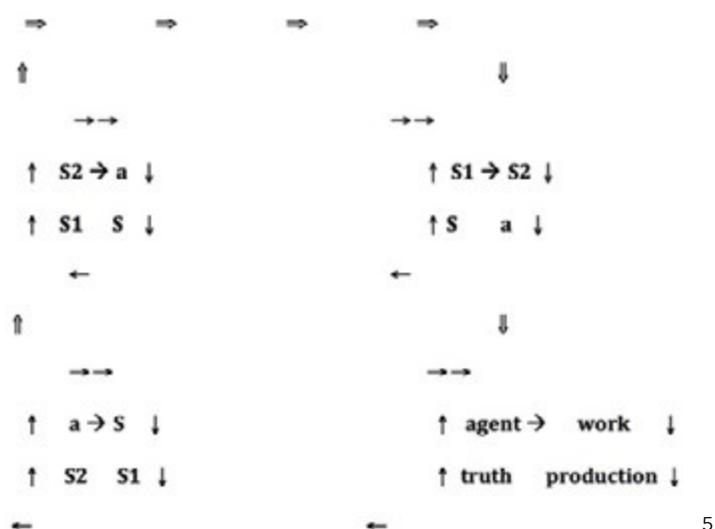
This technologized avatar is problematic – both clinically and culturally – in that this imaginary identification is blurring the distinction between the virtual and the real in ways that we might not yet perhaps have seen outside the psychopathological. The technologized avatar is becoming concrete; virtual and Real at the same time, something that transcends the ‘wetware’ of the abject human body.

To be human, to be full of ‘errors’, seems to becoming more and more of a struggle on the level of some marketable super-ego that involves the imperative of a populist mental and physical hygiene. We are not perfect, we are full of ‘sins’, located directly in the ‘natural’ and unforgivable body. We locate guilt in a

different place, that of 'nature'. Pleasure — *jouissance* — is found and paid for via the distancing effect of the screen and the 'virtual' — intangible — space.

We are saturated by the commands of our time with this virtual space that is at once incorporeal, but very Real in the Lacanian sense. There is a bridge appearing between 'virtual' and 'virtuous', and the Imaginary body is morphing into a fetish; this 'perfect', 'pure' body is the Real object that ameliorates the pain of all lack and imperfection.

This saturation point is — I believe — at a point where capitalism (and the choices that small market competition can provide) no longer exists, rather we are at a point of post-, or hyper-, capitalism. Martin Flanagan (referring to Noel Pearson) writes that it is a time of 'soulless cosmopolitanism'.³ This is a useful phrase that encounters both the notion of objectification in the psychoanalytical sense — that the object is a de-personalized Real object without subjectivity⁴ — and the lack of choices to be and think and do otherwise; that the subject must take the object as it is, and not raise any questions to do with this object. Indeed, what is the position of the subject to this body-object that is both Real and virtual at the same time? When the object becomes the prime signifier that speaks for us? What room is there to speak for and from subjectivity? Where is there a dimension for discourse to manoeuvre, as Lacan's mathemes of discourses do, each one revolving not only about itself, but as they revolve around each other?



A discourse without movement is no longer a discourse, it becomes an ideology, a static command which has more to do with the object — concrete, fetishistic, fixed. In Lacan, there is reference to a certain type of ideology, which is interrogated in *Kant avec Sade* (1963). This is, of course, the pervert's ideology,

the will to *jouissance*, the command to enjoy the object endlessly without break, without pause, according to the one who knows how you enjoy and who will service your enjoyment ad infinitum. (As the Marquis de Sade commanded his 'willing playmates'.)

"This only occurs when its apparent agent freezes with the rigidity of an object, in view of having his division as a subject entirely reflected in the Other."⁶

The pervert's command is universal, and allows of no variations. It is overwhelming to encounter and it can cause such anxiety that it leaves little room to hit the 'off' button and sit down and *have a good think*, in peace and quiet. It is an anxiety of fullness.

But we know this also to be true; perversion proper comes to place to cover up an anxiety to do with castration, the 'no'. Perversion proper does not admit to lack even though it knows it is there, a double-think of disavowal. For in the perverse schema, lack causes an anxiety that is unbearable, much like boredom is these days to young people.

Lack is always problematic. This is the neurotic's problem and question; what don't I have? Do I want it? How do I get it? What happens when I get it and I don't like it? This, then, following Lacan, becomes an issue of desire. We may find an *object* of desire, indeed, without desire for some thing there is not much left. But desire must be sustained somehow, and the object of our desire may never be 'caught'. Desire does something to counter the perverse command to endlessly enjoy, as the lack that desire causes "[...] is a defence, a defence against going beyond a limit in [unbearable] *jouissance*."⁷

But hyper-capitalism commands us through the will to *jouissance*; *you may not lack, you may not desire, we know what will make you happy and we will sell it to you. And you will be happy.*

This, then, becomes the conundrum for the neurotic's relationship to lack in a perverse terrain; *what do I do with lack?*

The question of intellectual freedom plays out thus: *am I allowed to lack? Can I lack where the imperative is to be full?*

This is why 'why?' has become a crooked question. Perhaps intellectual freedom is involved not with plugging the gaps of a question with an instant answer, an avatar that covers our inadequacies, an ideology, a command. Perhaps intellectual freedom has more to do with the ebb and flow of discourse, questions, lacks, and the perpetual unanswered 'why' that we teach our children to not ask, the 'why' of 'failure' and therefore of desire.

And perhaps — because I am a Lacanian analyst — I can posit that

intellectual freedom has room on the psychoanalytical couch, where we can pursue the unanswered ‘why’ for as long as we choose. Intellectual freedom may very well be at the place where we recognize that lack is not, after all, a bad thing, and we can begin to ask something with the crooked and imperfect ‘Why?’

¹ Lacan 1970:177

² Lacan 1949

³ Flanagan 2016

⁴ Including and especially the love object, which can be found with a swipe-right after matching the profile.

⁵ Lacan 1970:169

⁶ Lacan 1963:653

⁷ Lacan 1960:699

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