

The Not-All

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To introduce the problem of the *not-all*, we can take as our point of departure an interesting contrast. While theoreticians of femininity in the 1960s and 70s gave a privileged place to the notion of the woman's solitude, of her space, as indicated in Virginia Woolf's title A Room of One's Own, Lacan, on the contrary, chose to end his article on the Propos Directifs..., not with the image of the woman alone but rather with that of the *salon*, the congregation of women. The *salonnières* rather than the room of one's own: this tension gives us a clue to elaborate the problem of the not-all and also to define the meaning that solitude may have for a woman. When Lacan writes that a woman's partner is solitude, it is not only the term 'partner' that invites theorization. If writers have been telling us for centuries what a central role solitude plays in femininity, Lacan's remark invites us to give an analytic sense to the term rather than to accept it as a given.

So to begin our investigation, let's take two *salons*, or rather, one *salon* and one bedroom. The *salon* is that of the logician and philosopher Moritz Schlick, one of the founders of the Vienna Circle, and the bedroom is that of Mae West, the American star of theatre and cinema. In Schlick's living room we find a group of thinkers that includes Wittgenstein, who are meeting to discuss the meaning of the concept "All", the universal, in logic. And in Mae West's bedroom we find a group of sailors waiting for the star. So, both rooms are full: we are hardly in the isolation of the room that is one's own.

In Schlick's living room, the problem of quantification, of the "all", is tackled in the following way. They discuss the proposition "All the men in this room are wearing trousers." This sentence pre-occupied the study group for many long hours of work. To say "All the men in this room are wearing trousers" supposes the existence of a completed totality of men who are wearing trousers. According to one view the proposition is identified with an *enumeration*, that is, a list, such as "Wittgenstein is wearing trousers and Schlick is wearing trousers and..." Clearly, in Schlick's living room it would have been possible to carry out this sort of enumeration, but what would one do to interpret propositions about everything in the world? We remember, indeed, that if the Russellian theory of propositional functions is accepted, the proposition "All the men in this room are wearing trousers" does not take as its subject all the thinkers there, but, rather, *everything that there is in the whole entire universe*. Since the proposition is interpreted as "For all possible values of x, if x is a man in this room, then x is wearing trousers." So the initial proposition immediately transports us beyond the Schlick household and confronts us with the impossibility of enumerating all the objects in the universe. A different perspective, perhaps a happier one, involves interpreting the proposition less as an implicit enumeration than as a relation between *concepts*, that is, in our example, a relation between the concept "to be a man" and the concept "to wear trousers." The idea would be to see if there is a link between the two, such as implication: if so, one wouldn't have to bother going round to examine Wittgenstein, Schlick, Carnap, etc. But this brings us back to nothing less than the linguistic problems that the appeal to logic was supposed to avoid since concepts and general terms are signifiers. It introduces shifts of meaning and transferences in logic: it is sure that the real question at the Schlick's was whether it was him or his wife who was wearing the trousers. And to determine whether the sexual life of Wittgenstein allowed one to subsume him

under the concept “to be a man.”

To leave the slippery terrain of language and to return to so-called logical rigour, should one reintroduce a theory of enumeration in order to tackle the problem of universals? Certainly, this is what Lacan advises against on page 94 of Encore when he specifies that the quantifiers are not to be interpreted at the extensional level. This is why Lacan rejects the De Morgan laws, the very laws he uses in 1964 when he is elaborating the dialectic of alienation and separation, and which suppose that; $\forall x \Phi x \text{ -----} \rightarrow \exists x \bar{\Phi} x$

and which are based on the idea that the universal quantifier is equivalent to an infinite conjunction (Wittgenstein is wearing trousers and Schlick is wearing trousers and Carnap is wearing trousers...). Lacan is rejecting a generally accepted canon of classical logic, that the negation of the universally quantified proposition ($\forall x \Phi x$) implies the existence of an exception ($\exists x \bar{\Phi} x$). In its place, Lacan introduces what seems to be nothing less than its contrary: ($\bar{\exists} x \bar{\Phi} x$). And now he gives us the crucial detail, still on page 94. The not-all, he says, is not the existence of something which results from a negation ($\bar{\forall} x$), but it involves rather what he calls “an indeterminate existence”, an existence which must be understood in the *intuitionistic* sense as an element *to be constructed*, that is, “to know where this existence is situated.” The paradox of this position is that Lacan is rejecting classical logic and favouring an intuitionistic version, but what is it that characterizes intuitionistic logic, if not a rejection of the idea of the actual infinite, which seems to be precisely Lacan’s thesis about feminine sexuality in this seminar! The logical apparatus that Lacan is appealing to seems to run against the thesis he is exploring. For an elegant resolution of this apparent tension, one may consult M. Badiou’s article in his recent collection of essays on precisely this point. Without going into detail here, we can say that the crucial variable is the fact that Lacan does not say that feminine *jouissance* is infinite, but rather that it is infinite *in relation to* Φx .

Another problem emerges at this point. Lacan, as we have seen, rejects the *extensional* interpretation of the quantifier, that is, he rejects the interpretation which would proceed one by one. But it seems that it is precisely with this *one by one* that Lacan would encourage the analytic approach to women. It is Lacan’s Ockhamist streak. So how might one reconcile these two apparently contradictory positions? If we do not accept the extensional approach, we might appeal to the *intensional* approach, that is, the approach via the concept. But here too Lacan is resolute: “The Woman doesn’t exist,” he says. In other words, there is no single *concept* of the woman. Perhaps it is exactly in this sense that we can understand Lacan’s reference to the “indeterminate existence”, a position *between* intension and extension involving a reference to the logic of relations. This approach would be entirely consistent with the originality of the thesis of Encore, as Lacan abandons essentialist definitions of woman and situates her on his schema *between* Φ and $S(A)$: in other words, femininity is defined not as an essence but *as a relation*. If she is in the phallic function, she is not everywhere there, and if she has a relation with $S(A)$ it is nonetheless in castration. This novel point of view, to see femininity as *an oscillation*, avoids reducing everything to the phallus as well as avoiding those theories which glorify the mystical side of a woman. For Lacan, femininity is reduced neither to Φ , nor to the episodic relation with $S(A)$: this non-reduction gives the very definition of the not-all on page 75 of the Seminar.

To place this structure within an empirical context, we can return to Mae West.

There are two versions of what happens. (A) The star arrives home. She finds ten sailors in her bedroom. She says "I'm tired. Two have to go." (B) The star arrives home. She finds ten sailors in her bedroom. She says "I'm tired. Eight can stay." Experiments carried out in 1945 and 1989 establish that the first version functions as a joke, producing laughter, whereas the second does not.¹ I devoted a large part of my doctoral thesis to a study of this joke, and I am not going to weary you now with my hypotheses about it. What interests us here is the fact that we find a relatively large group of people in a small space, that there is a woman at the centre and that there is a not-all, a subtraction, the 10 minus 2. So, why do we laugh at the first version but not at the second? Why is the orgy (*partouse*) introduced by the not-all (*pas-tout*), the 10-2? The sexual image remains the same in both versions: a night with 8 sailors. This implies that the laughter is connected less to the sexual image than to what *she says*. We remember that, in contrast to someone like Madonna, who fascinates not by what she says but by what we suppose she thinks, Mae West was famous as someone who spoke, so famous that she was unable during a certain period of her life to order a cup of coffee without a sexual insinuation emerging. We might propose the hypothesis here that the reason why so many magazines and books considered the possibility that Mae had a penis, that she was in fact a man, is due simply to the fact that she was someone *who spoke*, who incarnated the gap between signifier and signified, to the fact of always signifying something else. When she asked for a cup of coffee, she came to represent the phallus.

And in the joke, the phallic function is present, in the fact, for example, that *jouissance* is linked to a number 8, but also, surely, in the fatigue. Indeed, Lacan refers to what he calls "the fatigue of the subject" in his text on Lagache, and we might read this phrase in the context of the developments at the start of the seminar Encore on tiredness where Lacan discusses the image of Achilles and Briseis. The fatigue of Achilles is very different from that of Briseis, just as the fatigue of Mae West is very different from that of the sailors who had to spend their evening waiting for her. When one tells the two versions of the joke without the phrase "I'm tired", people don't laugh. This implies that perhaps it is less the "Two have to go", than the "I'm tired", which functions as the punchline of the joke. If she is going to spend the night with 8 sailors, what does it mean for her to be tired? And, as Pierre Bruno pointed out to me, if Mae is going to spend the night with 8, that is, with not-all of the sailors, this supposes the existence of someone who would have kept all 10 of them. The woman is thus situated between the $\exists x \bar{\Phi} x$ and the $\bar{\exists} x$ incarnated by the 8 sailors. Indeed, to say "Eight can stay" rather than "Two have to go", introduces the not-all much less, in the sense that "Two have to go" implies that *jouissance* has to pass via subtraction, that phallic happiness will always have a limit in a different space,² incarnated in this instance by the 2 sailors who leave. The 8 and the 2 are thus in a certain sense incommensurable. We can see this at the empirical level in the fact that men say "I'm ready", whereas women often say "Just another five minutes."

It is interesting to note that when Mae staged her play Sex in New York in 1926 she

¹ First discussed in Eidelberg, 'A Contribution to the Study of Wit', *Psychoanalytic Review*, 1945, pp. 31-66. Cf. D. Leader, "How one body acts on another: lacanian studies around comedy." Thesis, University of Paris VIII, 1992.

² This is not incompatible with the thesis that the space of phallic *jouissance* is compact.

was sent to jail for corruption of public morals, with a sentence of 10 days. The judge then reduced this to 8 days due to good behaviour. The play concerned a woman who remains faithful to a group of sailors and eventually abandons everything to follow the fleet to Trinidad, a word which contains dad. The father is thus situated as the limit to the series of sailors. The passage from a room full of sailors to the solitude of a prison cell thus operates via the evocation of the father, and this brings us back to the motif of solitude. We remember that Lacan was most attentive to the adverb *allein* in his analysis of the case of Little Hans (in sentences like “being alone with the mother”), and this invites us to elaborate what it might mean to be alone. Let us suggest that being alone for a woman means, frequently, that “not being with the father” is privileged over “being with a man.” The state of this “not being with” is libidinalized, which does not contradict the analytic commonplace that in the Encore schema, S(A) means everything except the dad. This thesis may be verified by listening to what nuns say about their relations to their families and to the Deity and, if we were to elaborate further, we would be led to the question of why it is that claustrophobia is relatively rare in women.

Let's conclude with one last question. Lacan refers to solitude as the partner of woman in L'Etourdit, a text which is contemporary with the seminar Encore. But in the Encore schema it seems that woman has at least two partners, since the arrows are directed towards S(A) and also Φ . How might one resolve the apparent contradiction here between the singularity which characterizes solitude and the doubling which characterizes the schema in Encore? One solution emerges if we put it in relation with a remark of Lacan in 1955 on feminine sexuality: if in Encore he could say that “The Woman doesn't exist”, in the seminar on the Ego he could say that woman aims at what he calls “the universal man.” This rather enigmatic phrase can be understood in several ways, for example, as a reference to Christ, the castrated lover and universal man *par excellence*. But what remains invariant is the implication that the universal man is everything except the man as partner. This is why in the Encore schema, the Φ and the $\$$ on the left hand side are not connected: there is no coalescence between the male subject and what the woman aims at, despite the fact that in the Schema R, for example, the phallic function and the subject function are superimposed. This also explains why in the 8000 letters of Juliette Drouet to Victor Hugo, there is not one single reference to the colour of his hair.